

ZSUZSA HETÉNYI



IN A
MAELSTROM

The History of Russian-Jewish Prose
(1860–1940)

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The History of Russian-Jewish Prose (1860–1940)

by

Zsuzsa Hetényi



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400 West 59th Street, New York NY 10019, USA
Tel: +1-212-547-6932
Fax: +1-212-548-4607
E-mail: mgreenwald@sorosny.org

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CONTENTS

Preface	ix
The Concept of Russian-Jewish Literature and its Ambiguities	1
One literature—in various languages	2
Scattered attempts at a definition	2
Jewish literature in another language	12
The three mother tongues of Russian Jewry	14
The Concept of Russian-Jewish literature and Jewish literature in another language	21
Religion—nation—culture	30

THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN-JEWISH PROSE (1860–1940)

I. “Turbulent Times”—The Utopia of Assimilation	37
The Jewish Haskala and Russian reforms:	
the start of acculturation	37
Periodization of Russian-Jewish literature	38
Russian-Jewish periodicals (1860–1934)	39
The beginning of Russian-Jewish literature (before 1860)	42
Osip RABINOVICH	43
“History of the Journey of Khayim-Shulim”	50
Story and Irony	54
Odessa	56
“Khayim-Shulim” and Yiddish literature	59
Lev LEVANDA	62
Grigory BOGROV	70

Yakov ROMBRO	78
“Cholera Wedding”	80
II. “In a Maelstrom”—After the Pogroms	89
The pogroms as a watershed	89
Zionism—Socialism—Emigration?	95
Mordekhai BEN-AMI	97
NAUMOV-KOGAN	100
Sergei YAROSHEVSKY	105
III. “At a Crossroads”—Choosing Paths	115
Organizations of Jewish culture	118
Semion AN-SKY	120
Aleksandr KIPEN	131
David AIZMAN	139
Semyon YUSHKEVICH	149
Pogrom in literature: strategies between the documentarian and the emotional approach	166
IV. “Motherland” and “Cemetery”—Climax and Endgame	169
The issue of “Jewish revolutionaries”	170
“De-Judaization” and “Yiddishization”	173
“There are Jews but there is no Jewish question...”	177
Isaac BABEL	179
Lev LUNTS	189
Andrei SOBOL	196
Semyon HEKHT	200
Mikhail KOZAKOV	207
Vladimir JABOTINSKY	212
A Look forward: Friedrich GORENSTEIN	220
V. A Pattern of Narrative in Jewish Assimilation Literature. The Child’s Eye View—Isaac Babel in a Russian-Jewish, American and Euro- pean Literary Context. A Comparative Conclusion	229
“Childhood. At Grandmother’s”	230
Catalogue and images, images and parataxis, parataxis and toler- ance	233
“The Story of My Dovecot”	238
Michael Gold and Isaac Babel	241

Henry Roth and Isaac Babel	245
Overstatement, exaggeration—fantasy—creativity (“First Love” and “In the Basement”)	251
Summary	254
Biographies of Authors	259
Appendix	285
Bibliography	287
Index	303

PREFACE

This book is an attempt to give an overview of Jewish literature written in Russian in the period between 1860 and 1940, more precisely of prose fiction as a part of that body of literature, and as such, the first comprehensive monograph ever on this particular topic. The unsettled issue of the definition of Russian-Jewish literature, a matter of controversy to this day, will be discussed in detail in the first chapter. It is no exaggeration to say that the works to be treated in the following pages are practically unknown, as are their authors. While getting ready to write this book, I had to read scores of pieces of fiction as well as essays available only on microfilm, most of them never published since their original appearance in the 19th or early 20th century. The historic cataclysms suffered by Russia wrought enormous damage and caused irreparable losses not only in human life, but also where books and documents were concerned. I came across a book by Osip Rabinovich published in 1881 whose pages I was the first to cut when I found it in a library in Switzerland.

My getting engaged in the study of Russian-Jewish works written between 1860 and 1940 was the logical outcome of a monograph I wrote on Isaac Babel in 1985 (which, however, could be published only in 1992). I discovered the extent of the influence of earlier Russian-Jewish authors on Babel's oeuvre after my monograph had been completed. This was followed by the recognition that what I was looking at was not simply a couple of writers but an entire process. The next thing I realized was that the topic was all but unresearched. Even "sporadic investigation" would have been hard to speak of, let alone a systematic study.

Thus the goal I set myself was to provide a view of that process, the stream of Russian-Jewish literature as a phenomenon of literary history, and also to introduce authors representative of the whole of this trend as well as its diversity. I intend to outline these eighty years of Russian-Jewish

literature by drawing portraits of seventeen writers and of one more, a late predecessor. They are the following (in alphabetical order): David Aizman, Semyon An-sky, Isaac Babel, Mordekhai Ben-Ami, Grigory Bogrov, Semyon Hekht, Vladimir Jabotinsky, Aleksandr Kipen, Mikhail Kozakov, Lev Levanda, Lev Lunts, Naumov-Kogan, Osip Rabinovich, Yakov Rombro, Andrei Sobol, Sergei Yaroshevsky, Semyon Yushkevich and the eighteenth is a writer of post-war Soviet times, Friedrich Gorenstein. I had to seek for the actual texts and the material covering their cultural historical background in old periodicals and contemporary editions. Charting these sources itself became an important part of the project. It turned out that a major share of the texts concerned is hidden in fragmented, hard-to-find 19th century or early 20th century periodicals, and is rarely accessible in a book form or republished at all. I ventured to the territories of other disciplines like history, cultural history and ethnography only in so far as seemed unavoidable. In the process of the work I was compelled to interpret and explain terms and concepts the meaning of which are extremely diverse in ordinary usage as well as in scholarly terminology, terms like “Jewish,” “Russian-Jewish” and “a Russian-Jewish writer.”

I was motivated by two causes and goals in my research. The first was my discovery that the ideas finding expression in Russian-Jewish literature already covered a considerable part of what has been told and re-told time and again up to this day about Jewish assimilation and anti-Semitism. The works and lives of Russian-Jewish authors may give rise to new thoughts in students of those topics. Thus the subject figuring in the title appears to be of a historical and literary character, yet it is directed to our times.

The other reason was more “scholarly” in intent, and aimed at what is called the “dissemination of knowledge”: it was to fill a major gap. The existence of such a huge blank spot in philology, a literary historical *terra incognita* of this size, seemed quite absurd to me. The better I got to know the “protagonists” of my story, their colourful, tragic, or at times painfully incomplete biographies, the more undeserved it seemed that their names were missing from the big reference books, and they were never put on the map of world literature. I hope that a few of the works described and analyzed in these pages will be found worthy of being republished some day.

These authors, with a few exceptions, are largely unfamiliar to Russian readers too. Their works have never been published since their first appearance, and even then (as you will see), they appeared for the most part in journals only. In order to fill that gap, I produced an anthology attached to the Hungarian edition of this book (2000), which was followed by a Russian-

language textbook edited by Shimon Markish and published in Kiev, not restricted to prose, and therefore less representative of it.¹

The method of my work, which combines the genres of literary history and a collection of essays, was determined by the subject I wanted to get closer to. Basic research does have its beauty, but “being there first” to write the first history of a literature, involves certain obligations which the author cannot fulfill unless the book is relatively easy to understand, so the use of complex scholarly terminology is best avoided. I know from experience that passing on content in a descriptive manner may lead interested readers or scholars to the sources interesting or important to them. That purpose is served by the voluminous and detailed notes that I have provided.

My research was limited to works of prose. The reason for this was partly the predominance of the genre, and partly the fact that only prose provided a continuous report on the changing forms of consciousness characteristic at various stages of the historical road to assimilation of Jewry. Nevertheless, I made mention of lyrical and dramatic works, too, where this was required by the actual oeuvre or by historical completeness (Semyon An-sky, Leon Mandelstam, Y. L. Nevakhovich, Semyon Yushkevich).

The method of investigation was, first and foremost, *philological*, since its subject matter was nothing but literature. The *interdisciplinary* nature of the subject, however, made it necessary to look beyond that frame of reference every now and then (describing certain historical events, like the pogroms of 1881–1882; detailing contemporary statistical figures, for instance, on ethnicity, mother tongue and readers’ behavior; backgrounds in ethnography, religious and cultural history, etc.).

My philological research was naturally dominated by a *thematic approach* since I was dealing with largely unfamiliar works and authors. While analyzing the works from the *poetical* aspect, the texts themselves were offering the methods; “rich texts” comparable to Babel’s are hardly found in the 19th century.

The dual linguistic culture involved here also offered an opportunity to investigate the subspecies of *intertextuality*, two of which appeared predominant. One was the presence of what may be called “pre-texts,” traceable largely to the “arch-text” of the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, which was not limited to parallels in motifs but was often found also in systems of metaphoric imagery and rhetoric undertones. This system of reference was not only highly familiar

1 *Rodnoi golos*, Kiev, 2001.

to Russian-speaking Jewish readers but also constituted a background for dialogical references creating a sense of close community with those readers. Folklore elements played a similar role. Another evident form of appearance of the inherently dialogical character of the works is found in the manifest or covert allusions or similarities to contemporary Russian literature (Gogol, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Goncharov, or the female characters of Russian literature) and world literature (Shakespeare, Heine, Gottfried Keller, Martin Buber, Gustav Meyrink). The function of this was to create a sense of being “literary” and, along with that, to fit into the “host” literature as well as into world literature. The *comparative* approach, by the way, proved productive not only for looking beyond Russian literature but also for comparisons inside, since an analysis of the evolution or, more precisely, change between 1860 and 1940 was one of the fundamental tasks. Thus, after the job of periodization had been accomplished, the cross-references of Russian-Jewish authors between each other also seemed highly interesting: Yaroshevsky was reaching back to Levanda, and Babel to Kipen. Also, some constant elements were recurring in descriptions of pogroms or in explanations of folk customs. When looking forward in time, devices could be examined, which these authors were the first to employ (e.g. using the child’s point of view), as well as elements of their work which had an influence on subsequent 20th century literature (Danilo Kiš, for instance). Two complementary chapters were written in 2005, specifically for the English edition. The first takes a forward look on a post-1940 Soviet-Jewish author, Friedrich Gorenstein, whose oeuvre presents a paradigmatic example for the break in the continuity of Russian-Jewish literature, indeed, the impossibility of organic continuation. The second chapter points at some parallels between Russian-Jewish and American-Jewish literature in the 20th century by taking the work of Isaac Babel, the “top achiever” of Russian-Jewish literature, as its starting point, and seeking for common patterns characteristic of the whole of “assimilation literature.” Both were developed from conference papers read in Paris, Jerusalem (2004) and Stanford University (2004) and published before in shorter version. The chapter on pogrom in literature was read in Stockholm (2005).

It was fundamentally important to investigate the storyteller’s position and the highly complex narrative relationship between the author and his text. The structure of these *narrative layers* is especially intriguing because, owing to their dual identity and uncertainties of self-definition, the question Russian-Jewish writers keep asking themselves is precisely “who I am?” and “what do I think of ourselves?,” the narrative layers illuminate the shifting viewpoints of internal and external narrative, the often highly delicate, hard-to-keep balance

between staying aloof and accepting identification. One can witness these shifts in the changes of the author's distance from the world portrayed or created, and from its characters. The duality of being both critical and accepting, attracted and repelled, is reflected by the different forms of modality, and in the ambivalence (in the psychological sense of the term rather than in the manner as it was used by Bakhtin) of the viewpoints of "we"/"us" and "them."

The material of my book, unearthed by novel research, offers indispensable information not only for comparative and literary studies but for cultural, historical, ethnographic, Judaist, religious and linguistic investigations as well. The volumes investigated include, among other things, source material on contemporary laws concerning Jews, on settlement structure, lifestyle, the coexistence of peoples and languages, elements of Jewish folklore as existing in the 19th century, the specific intellectual trends present in assimilation in Russia as well as the stages in which it was accomplished. The primary texts describing the spiritual folklore of Diaspora Jews cover a broad interdisciplinary area, and may be relevant for the study of historical lifestyle research and for multicultural investigations (Diaspora and minority research, bilingualism research, identity research). The book offers a literary historical overview of the period defined in the subtitle, of the thought-provoking debates on the concept of Russian-Jewish literature, connections between the authors and the characteristics of the age. I did my best to turn the portrait chapters introducing the individual authors into texts that may be read on their own, independent of one another, which resulted in some repetitions (e.g. I provided explanations of certain concepts in two places). The book is complemented with a separate biographical summary and index.

The book borrowed its title—*In a Maelstrom*—from a story written in 1883 by Sergei Yaroshevsky. But the same title is borne by Volume IV of the collected edition of An-sky's work. It represents a powerful metaphor characterizing the thwarted hopes for assimilation of Russian-Jewish writers, and the increasing rapidity with which traditional Russian Jewry went under between 1860 and 1940.

Far more than recognition is due to the book's first reader and advisor, Shimon Markish, the number-one specialist of the topic and the initiator of the study of Russian-Jewish literature (from 1977 onwards). I was granted unlimited access to his personal archives, research material and notes, and he called my attention to a great deal of interesting information. It was in connection with this work that we made each other's acquaintance in 1987. We became close in 1991, and married in 1995. Since his death in 2003, his ar-

chive is in my custody. I dedicate my work to his memory, all the more so as it would have been his prerogative to write this book.

The investigations furnishing the basis for the book were first supported by the Scholarship for Young Researchers under the East Europe Programme of the Swiss Confederation (1993–1994), then by a scholarship from the Soros Foundation (1996–1997). My work and the Hungarian edition of my book was also aided, after several failed attempts to gain support from various Hungarian and foreign organizations (including Jewish cultural ones), by the Higher Education Research and Development Programme of the Hungarian Ministry of Education, as well as the Programme of Scholarly Studies of Nationwide Prominence of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Professor George Nivat of the Department of Slavic Studies of Geneva University and Professor Asher Milbauer of Florida International University made it possible for the above-mentioned scholarships to produce genuine results by their generous invitations; thanks for their trust in my topic. Throughout my work I received professional and kind help from Mária Szlatky, Director of the Library of the Central European University. A short additional research grant was provided again by Geneva University, with the help of Prof. Jean-Philippe Jaccard and Edith Bohren, to complete this English version of my book.

The expert comments of Professor John Klier (University College London), whose death in September 2007 means an irrecoverable loss to all who knew him and Russian-Jewish historiography, András Kovács, Professor of Sociology of Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest) and Professor of Jewish Studies at the Central European University, by the literary historian Ferenc Takács of the English Department of Eötvös Loránd University and Zoltán Sz. Bíró, associate professor at Centre for Russian Studies, ELTE and Corvinus University, Budapest, contributed a great deal to the birth of the English edition.

Special thanks are due to the Hanadiv Charitable Foundation (London) whose support in 2006, enabled the birth of the English text. I am also indebted to the European Jewish Publication Society (London) for covering the additional costs of the English translation. The support from Britain arrived in Hungary through the good offices of the Minoritás Foundation, where the cooperation was helped along by Gabriella Borsós. I am thankful to all of them, but most of all to CEU Press.

A fellow Slavic scholar in Hungary once asked me if I studied Jewish literature because I was Jewish. I returned the question: why was he devoting his life to Russian literature when he was not Russian? To me it was emblematic, a symbol of the openness and healthy cross-fertilization of cultures when, at a

conference in Washington, I was listening to a brilliant lecture by a black-skinned, African-born woman colleague on the work of Dovid Knut, a Jewish poet exiled to Paris and writing in Russian. Russian-Jewish literature is part of both Jewish and Russian literature (this, among other things, is what this book is setting out to prove), and anyway part of world literature, the indivisible and multicolored common treasure of readers and scholars all over the world.

Note from translator: on transliteration

Use of Cyrillic characters has been avoided in this book. Russian text is transliterated in accordance with the Library of Congress transliteration system. Soft consonants are not always marked with the symbol ' (Gorky rather than Gor'ky). Where the spelling of names is concerned, the variants used here are the ones enjoying the widest currency. However, to dispel uncertainties and facilitate further research, a chart of spellings in common use has been appended. Quotations from Russian texts, where the source is given in Russian, are translated from the Hungarian translation of the author.

THE CONCEPT OF RUSSIAN-JEWISH LITERATURE AND ITS AMBIGUITIES

A THEORETICAL VIEW

“Russian-Jewish literature,” the term appearing in the title of this book, has no unambiguous or universally accepted definition in the literature. First of all, what the word “Russian” signifies in this context is not that the works in question were written in Russia but that they were written in the Russian language rather than in Yiddish or Hebrew. Within Jewish literature as a whole, written in a wide variety of languages all over the world, Russian is only one of the languages beside, of course, Hebrew and Yiddish (and naturally Arabic as well as numerous others). Hebrew, and to a lesser extent also Yiddish, literature represents a common cultural treasure of all the world’s Jews, one that knows no frontier, while Russian-Jewish literature belongs mainly to those Russian Jews who, at the beginning of the 20th century, still made up more than half of the world’s Jewish population.¹ “Russian-Jewish literature” should be understood in the same sense as “American-Jewish” literature which, as the literature of American Jews written in the English language, is a part of both American and universal Jewish literature. Before the appearance of American-Jewish literature, the largest body of modern Jewish literature was represented by Russian-Jewish literature.

The process, as a result of which the central element of Jewish identity—quite differently from identities of other awakening nations, especially minor European ones—would not be the language, began in the 19th century. This was especially so in the territory of Russia where members of no national or

¹ Over 7 million, according to Lvov-Rogachevsky. Lvov-Rogachevsky, V.: *Russko-evreiskaia literatura*, 1922 (written in 1917), p. 37; or Lvov-Rogachevsky, V.: *A History of Russian-Jewish Literature*, ed. and trans. Arthur Levin, 1979.

ethnic minority were able to get ahead in life without learning Russian.² It seems reasonable, after a review of the secondary sources, to begin the demarcation of the concept of Russian-Jewish literature, a heavily complicated problem, precisely with the issue of the language.

One literature—in various languages

Scattered attempts at a definition in the literature

The existence of Russian-Jewish literature is far from being universally acknowledged. As it will be seen, it is regarded as nonexistent by works widely differing in approach as well as in genre. This is quite striking since otherwise there is no end to attempts at analyzing the history and culture, in general, of the Jewish population of the region and the period, most of them trying to revive “a vanished world,” approached in a heavily nostalgic manner, and generally centered on Hebrew and Jewish culture. But the interest is very recent, manifested before 1985 only by few.

Russian-Jewish literature is a *borderline phenomenon*, a literature with *dual cultural roots*. Representatives of the “pure” form of either culture reject this borderline area for various reasons. Those on the side of Jewish literature are barricading themselves in their exclusively Hebrew and Yiddish-language traditions,³ whereas for Russian literary sensibilities, Russian-Jewish literature is something of a foreign body, which is also lacking in value. True enough, these works rarely come even close to the peaks conquered by Russian prose, quite unique world-wide, and are mostly writings by second or third-rate authors. However, this does not justify the exclusion of this voluminous prose production from the history of literature. Second-rank literature has (at least) as great an effect on the thinking of an age as front-line literature has, and also reveals a great deal about the age, its forms of awareness, customs and lifestyles.⁴ Arkady Gornfeld, who appreciated Russian-Jewish literature, wrote in an article in 1923:

2 Jews, at the same time, were also using the language of the smaller nations in whose midst they happened to live. Jews in Dagestan, for example, speak the Tat language, which belongs to the Iranian languages. See Haarman, H.: “Yiddish and Other Languages in the Soviet Union,” *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages*, ed. J. A. Fishman, 1985, p. 157.

3 See Stemberger, G.: *Geschichte der jüdische Literatur*, 1977.

4 Its Russian variant is not the only one where Jewish literature remains in the second rank. When making a comparison between G. K. Chesterton and Israel Zangwill, the American au-

Literature is a natural and invincible outcome of the ever-evolving life of the language. It needs geniuses who, however, do not just drop from heaven, but it also needs ordinary-day mediocrity, slow and painstaking work, and consistent evolution, in which second-and third-rate workers play an unnoticeable but nevertheless highly respectable part. This is where, besides many Russians, also Russian-Jewish authors participate.⁵

Second-rank Russian-Jewish literature is also interesting because its sense of insecurity due to its dual bond, and its stubborn idealism (seeking an equilibrium where, as these writers knew all too well, none existed) anticipated something of the value-challenging, perennial search of the 20th century. The position of the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia was quite different from that of Jewish authors writing in Western European national languages, and as we shall see, also its path-seeking led into very different directions.

There are many misunderstandings surrounding Russian-Jewish literature, and not all of them political. Nor are they limited to East Europe. Let me refer first to an author of such immense prestige as Saul Bellow, who, in a part of the world which may be less partial and narrow-minded than Europe, edited and introduced a collection of Jewish short stories. The last piece he included in the collection *Great Jewish Stories* is a story by Babel. He raises the question as to why, if Babel knew Yiddish well enough to be able to write in Yiddish, he still chose for his works Russian, the language "of the oppressors, of Pobedonostev and the Black Hundreds? He wrote in Russian from motives we can never expect to understand fully. [...] Who was Babel? Where did he come from? He was an accident."⁶ Saul Bellow is wrong several times over. It was not an accident that Babel wrote in Russian; it was his mother tongue. Moreover, he actually returned home from his family in Paris precisely be-

thor Cynthia Ozick emphasises that of these two minority writers, only Chesterton was accepted into English literature. Charles Lamb and Isaac D'Israeli refused to be Jewish writers, and, as opposed to their other "minority" contemporaries, they also became forgotten. According to Ozick, two French half-Jews—Montaigne and Proust—may be the only ones, if any at all, to have made it to the front line. See Ozick, C.: "America: Toward Yawneh," *Judaism* 19 (1970), pp. 264–82.

5 Gornfeld, A.: "Russkoie slovo i evreiskoie tvorchestvo," *Evreiskii Almanach*, eds. B. I. Kaufman and I. A. Kleinman, Petrograd–Moscow, 1923, p. 192.

6 *Great Jewish Stories*, ed. Saul Bellow, 1963, p. 16. However, in a different context relating to himself, Bellow clearly understands the idea of a Jewish writer "writing in a different language." He tells how Samuel Agnon advised him to translate his (Bellow's) works into Hebrew "because, he said, they would survive only in the Holy Tongue... I cited Heine as an example of a poet who had done rather well in German. 'Ah,' said Mr. Agnon, 'we have him beautifully translated into Hebrew. He is safe.'" *ibid.*, p. 15.

cause he was unable to live without that language. Full of pathos as such an explanation may sound, it is nevertheless unambiguously clear from his letters to his family.⁷ Babel won his popularity in Russian, and had an influence on nearly all his contemporaries in that language. In any case, his Yiddish was only spoken; he would never have been able to write in Yiddish. He copy-edited Sholom Aleichem's Russian edition (not the Yiddish one, as Saul Bellow thought) with a dictionary. Babel grew out of Russian-Jewish literature, that was where he came from, and this cannot be seen as coincidental. For me it was Babel's oeuvre, the tip of the iceberg, which led me to the thought that there must have been a Russian-Jewish literature preceding him in time, and evolving in a way so as to furnish the ground for him, even if that literature lacked a top-class author with a stature comparable to Babel's.

The first literary historical summary of Russian-Jewish literature in Russia saw light in 1885. What this means is that for its author, Russian-Jewish literature was already then, a couple of years after the close of the first period in 1882 (on the periods, see Chapter 2), a phenomenon on which a summarizing article could be written. Under the title "Contemporary Chronicle," M. N. Lazarev's article reviews the individual works (which I shall also discuss later on), and also touches upon some general theoretical matters. According to Lazarev, Russian-Jewish literature is a product of the split condition of Russian Jewry: it is both Russian, as far as the political social problems are concerned, and Jewish, in so far as it portrays Jewish life from inside. This duality stems from the Russian policy of oppression and from internal backwardness. He believes this literature emerged because modern Hebrew literature failed to come into being. The attempt to create it "remained a literary exploit where the reader's attention is caught less by the inner contents as by the external mastery with the help of which the author tries to overcome insurmountable technical difficulties, and attempts to write in a dead language about modern life."⁸ Yiddish literature so far has produced unremarkable comedies only, he writes. Jewish readers rapidly got accustomed to reading Russian literature instead, and became fond of it, but missed the portrayal of Jewish life from it. That is how Russian-Jewish literature came into being, a transitional phenomenon, that is, "*Jewish literature in Russian language, imitating Russian models,*" which is "abnormal, accidental and exceptional."

⁷ Isaac Babel: *The Lonely Years. Unpublished Stories and Private Correspondence*. 1964. p. 106. Letter of 20 October, 1928.

⁸ *Voskhod* 5 (1885), p. 29.

Lazarev measures the works reviewed against contemporary Russian literature, and observes that Jewish literature written in Russian fails to come up to its artistic standards. It is not even fiction in the strict sense of the term: there is too much discussion in the works in question, with some authors inserting full essays into their works. Characters are anaemic, episodes haphazard, and all protagonists speak the same purified Russian language. Owing to their split state of mind, the authors are incapable of being unbiased; they are tendentious, portraying positive heroes in sentimental plots and, most important, their mind's eye is fixed upon some imaginary, hostile reader, whom they want constantly to win over, to convince about things which often have nothing to do with the work itself.⁹

The systematic bibliographical summary published in 1892 did not differentiate between literature with a Jewish identity and literature about Jews,¹⁰ and, oddly enough, this blurred view and confused approach have remained predominant in bibliographical works up to this day.¹¹

Volume X of the seventeen-volume Russian *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (1911) defines Jewish literature as follows: up to the 18th century it includes "all works written by Jews in Hebrew, Aramaic and other languages, and, in a broader sense, everything written by Jews or non-Jews in any language on any issue involving Jews."¹² Furthermore, there exists a "neo-Jewish literature" (this consists of works on religious topics and sermons from the 16th–17th centuries) and literature in "the Jewish vernacular, i.e. *Jüdisch-Deutsch jargon*," meaning Yiddish-language literature. Obviously, there is no room for the works to be discussed in my book in such a definition, which is useless for many other reasons as well (and most certainly from the mid-19th century onwards). On such a basis it is impossible to judge who matters as Jewish and to whom (see the first part of the definition), and the declaration that anything written about Jews belongs to Jewish literature is simply absurd. Should *The Merchant of Venice* be regarded as a part of Jewish literature or, on the same basis, Franz Kafka's *Amerika*, as a piece of American literature? It was these criteria of the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* which made Chernikhovsky write in a self-derogatory way in 1912: "up to now Jews have made no contribution to Rus-

⁹ Ibid., pp. 30, 39.

¹⁰ Bramson, L. M. and Brutskis, Iu. D.: *Sistematicheskii ukazatel' literatury o evreiakh na russkom iazyke so vremeni vvedeniia grazhdanskogo shrifta (1708) po dekabru 1889 g.* Supplement to the journal "Voskhod," St. Petersburg, 1892.

¹¹ Kelner, V. and Eliashevich, D.: "Evreii v khudozhestvennoi literature na russkom iazyke," *Russian Studies* 1/2 (1995), pp. 326–65.

¹² *Evreiskaia entsiklopedia*, 1906–1913, t. column 270.

sian literature.”¹³ That error in judgement was due to his attributing little value to the works written in Russian, but also to the fact that he did not know where to classify them.

Lvov-Rogachevsky's already mentioned summary, *Russian-Jewish Literature*, the only study on this topic,¹⁴ was published in 1922. The overview was born at the initiative and encouragement of Maxim Gorky. Gorky, who often raised his voice against anti-Semitism in his writings, wanted to publish a collection of essays during World War I (“at the time of the violent flare-up of Judeophobia,” as Lvov-Rogachevsky writes) with Russian authors writing about the contributions of Jews to Russian culture and “Russian life.” Aleksander Benois was meant to write about art, Vyacheslav Karatygin about music and Nikolai Nikolsky about religion. The author to write about Jewish participation in revolutionary movements would have been Svatikov.¹⁵ The plan was never realized, but Lvov-Rogachevsky's book came to be published on its own later on.

Lvov-Rogachevsky reviews the figure of the Jew in Russian literature just as if he were following the guidelines of the Russian-language *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, treating everything written about Jews as belonging to the topic. On the other hand, he focuses on the relationship of “national literature and language:”

The national character of a literature is not determined by the language in which it is written but by the fundamental views of the authors, their attraction to a certain people, the authors' spiritual kinship with the mentality and culture of their “native people,” their identification with the past, present and future of this people, by their position as to whom they write for, and whose national interests they protect.

In his view, Jewish literature written in Russian is “meant for the Russian intelligentsia, and for Jews who adopted the Russian language as their mother tongue.”¹⁶ He cites statistics based on the evidence of the 1897 Russian census. At that time, 3 per cent of the Jews in Russia regarded Russian as their mother tongue. That figure was higher among St. Petersburg Jews, and became even higher later on: 28 per cent in 1890, 36 per cent in 1900 and 42 per cent in 1910.¹⁷ The remaining 97 per cent regarded Yiddish as their

13 *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia*, St. Petersburg, [n.d.—1906–1913], t. column 641.

14 See note 2.

15 Gornfeld, op. cit., p. 178.

16 Lvov-Rogachevsky, p. 37.

17 Mentioned by N. Iukhneva in her lecture “Russkie evreii v XX veke: osobennosti etnicheskogo razviitiia,” held at the ICEES CI World Congress, Tampere, Finland, 2 August, 2000.

mother tongue, but 25 per cent of these could read and write in Russian. That percentage was considerably higher than literacy among Russians in general (and only ethnic Germans could boast of an even higher figure).

Incidentally (and certainly not in its own place where issues of language will be discussed), let me mention a contemporary article which indicates how carefully such figures must be treated. The brief argument published previous to the census in 1897 warns that the data will not conform to the facts "if Jews fail to make clear in advance as to what to reply to questions, like, for example 'your mother tongue'. Should they enter 'Yiddish', which is spoken only by the lower classes, or 'Hebrew', spoken by no one, or Russian, the language of family, school, books, trade and daily matters, common to every Jew living in Russia?"¹⁸ In theory they ought to enter the latter, except that according to the 1881 and 1890 St. Petersburg survey, only a seventh, or respectively, a third of the Jews there thought Russian to be their mother tongue. The author suggests that "because of a narrower national viewpoint" Jews thought more appropriate to name Yiddish as their mother tongue. (The increase from one seventh to a third may have been a consequence of the pogroms of 1881-1882.) Compared to the capital, fewer people spoke Russian in the countryside, and according to the article, occasionally it may have happened that Jews were pressured into calling Yiddish their mother tongue by the census-takers (on the argument that if their name was not Russian, their language could not be Russian either). In an odd and marginal but nevertheless interesting development, the statistics listed Jewish religious scholars and Talmudists who knew no Russian among the illiterates.

Another remarkable figure: in 1894 the lower middle class made up 94 per cent of the Jewish population, while this ratio was 10.7 per cent only in the total population. Concerning reading habits, let me cite a 1910 survey of the popularity of works of Russian literature translated into Yiddish. Aleksei Tolstoi ranked first, Korolenko second and Gorky was third. The first (Russian) Jewish author, Semyon Yushkevich, crops up only in the fourth place. 90 per cent of the visitors of libraries were Jewish, and Russian-language books were predominant in the stocks of Jewish libraries.¹⁹ As far as the position of libraries in the countryside was concerned, Chekhov made the remark that if there were no Jewish readers, these libraries could just as well be closed.

18 B-k. N. "K predstoiashchei perepisi," *Nedelnaia Khronika Voskhoda* 1-2 (1897), p. 5.

19 Kirzhnits, A. D.: "K kharakteristike sovremennogo chitatel'a-evreia," *Vestnik Obshchestva Rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhu evreiami Rossii*, No. 2 (1910), p. 58.

According to Lvov-Rogachevsky, Russian-Jewish literature is a literature of the petty bourgeoisie. It is two-faced: by trying to appeal to Russian and Jewish readers at the same time, "it loses its artistic integrity, and its value cannot be high enough." Until the 1860s, it was influenced by German literature, and after the 1860s, by Raznochinets authors (Pisarev, Chernyshevsky). Subsequently the most they can achieve is the imitation of Russian models. Minsky is the Jewish Nekrasov, Aizman the Jewish Chekhov, and An-sky the Jewish Uspensky. The influence of Russian tendentious and didactic literature is also powerful, and Russian-Jewish literature lacks pioneering or path-seeking tendencies, formal or creative. Russian-Jewish authors are compelled to be tendentious, even if it is not to their taste, because they are fighting for their oppressed people. Their works are expressions of things more suited to genres of journalism; they treat the same problems as in their articles.

Lvov-Rogachevsky establishes four periods in the history of Russian-Jewish literature. The early enlighteners at the time of Nicholas I believed in the power of reason (in the 1840s). With the beginning of emancipation, owing to the reforms of the 1860s, enlightenment grew into a nationwide movement, and assimilation to the Russians seemed feasible. The 1881 pogroms were followed by a period of national revival. Hopes for assimilation failed, and, on the other hand, Jews sought solutions outside Russia. The fourth period started when Jews began to join the working-class movement. This last period is not seen clearly enough by Lvov-Rogachevsky (because of its closeness, since the authors involved were his contemporaries), and he only highlights a few names, even though this was the period when the peculiar world of writers with dual roots and a double identity came into being.

The criteria used by Lvov-Rogachevsky are highly questionable. He enlists Nadson among the Russian-Jewish writers, even though his known work includes nothing but a single piece of poetry about a Jewish subject, while making no mention at all of Osip Dymov, the author of several works on Jewish topics. One is made to feel as if Lvov-Rogachevsky was reluctant to include works on Jewish topics written in Russian in Russian literature, preferring to enlist them rather in a specifically Jewish literature. It does not seem to occur to him at all that language in which a work of literature is written connects it (also) to the literature of the nation to which the language belongs. His one-sided approach was disapproved of already by a contemporary critic:

When literary science starts from the assumption that a specific literature constitutes a form of life of a specific language, and that national literature is the bearer and product of national tradition, then it also means that the artistic frame-

work and “vessel” of this tradition is, first and foremost, the language. Science knows no other point of view, because for historiography, the history of literature represents the history of literary, that is, mainly linguistic, form.

According to Gornfeld, literary identity is determined by language, and language only. There is, of course, such a thing as tri-lingual literature (as in the case of Switzerland), and non-language-dependent literatures also exist, like Catholic literature, for instance. One can group authors according to their national/ethnic identities with as much justification as according to their convictions, or, he notes without the slightest trace of irony (and with the pedantry of the late positivist), it is also possible to make up an alphabetical list of authors in an encyclopaedia, and then treat authors with names beginning with the letter “D” as a group. In any case, the main bearer of literature is the language, an element of fundamental importance, which writers of literary history should not try to peel away from literature. Gornfeld believes Jewish authors belong to Russian literature even if they were unable to produce major works. They showed a world of their own, and enriched Russian literature with new characters and a new voice.²⁰

It is all the more striking that in 1972, the opposite view is being put forth by a specialist on the subject, the translator and editor of Lvov-Rogachevsky’s work, who appears not to know of either Gornfeld’s article from 1923 or Lazarev’s from 1892, or disregards them both, illustrating how much the values of Russian-Jewish literature remained hidden: “It should be of course borne in mind that pre-Soviet Russian-Jewish literature did not produce artists of the stature of the Yiddish writers Sholom Aleichem or Isaac Loeb Perets.”²¹

It was at the same time, in the nineteen seventies, that the most comprehensive Western study on Jewish culture in Russia was produced,²² with two chapters, “Jewish Themes in Soviet Russian literature,” and “Jewish Contributions to Soviet Literature,” devoted to literature.²³ The East European émigré author not only fails to establish criteria as to what constitutes Jewish literature with a double identity, but makes statements which are fundamentally

20 Gornfeld, op. cit., pp. 183, 185, 189–200.

21 Arthur Levin in Lvov-Rogachevsky, op. cit., p. 185.

22 *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*, ed. L. Kochan, with an introduction by L. Shapiro, 1970 (2nd ed. 1972; 3rd ed. 1978).

23 Friedberg, M.: “Jewish Themes in Soviet Russian Literature”; “Jewish Contribution to Soviet Literature.” Friedberg fails to define what distinguishes Soviet Russian literature from Soviet Literature, cf. the two titles. Ibid., pp. 97–216, 217–25.

incorrect (based probably on his own, Polish experience). "When secular literature finally made its appearance among Jews in Russia during the Haskala period," he writes, "the centuries of enforced isolation of Russia's Jewish community were reflected not only in its nearly total preoccupation with narrowly Jewish subject matters, but also in the fact that most of it came to be written in Yiddish and in Hebrew."²⁴ The evolution of Hebrew and Yiddish secular fiction was, at best, parallel, but most likely took place later (see Robert Alter's theoretical work below, who, not being a Slavic scholar, understands this).²⁵ Friedberg also selects the authors whom he deems to be participants of the "contribution" according to their ancestry, and, while covering Pasternak and Mandelstam in the company of other authors who grew remote from Jewry in his article, he includes only one of the authors discussed in this book, Isaac Babel, and mentions only one of his predecessors, Yushkevich. However, he wrongly enlists Babel in the same category as Ehrenburg. "Both Isaac Babel and Ilya Ehrenburg wrote, primarily, about non-Russian locales... [wrong—Zs. H.] they could not convincingly affect a securely Russian prose when confronting Russian material."²⁶ (As for the standards, see the criteria for the definition of a Russian-Jewish literary work later on.)

The masterpieces of Russian-Jewish literature remained unknown even in their birthplace. Take, for instance, a work on the evolution of 19th century Russian prose from the so-called Soviet era, which may be regarded as basic in the literature of the subject. The special significance of *19th-century Russian Short Prose*²⁷ lies in the fact that the finest scholars of the 1970s extended their discussion also to the literary "rank and file," when seeking for the fundamental trends in the development of prose. The large-format, 560-page, comprehensive work of high academic standards reviews the Russian prose fiction of the 19th century by breaking it down to decades. Still, no Russian-Jewish prose writer is mentioned even though Russian-Jewish literature belonged precisely to the second rank of Russian prose, to "average literature." Russian literature refused acceptance to these authors, or let us believe the analysts: Russian-Jewish prose had no influence whatsoever on contemporary Russian prose. This was a literature which was shunned by literary history.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 217.

²⁵ Alter, R.: *The Invention of Hebrew Prose. Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism*, Seattle and London, 1985.

²⁶ Friedberg, M.: "Jewish Contribution to Soviet Literature," *The Jews in Soviet Russia*, p. 220.

²⁷ *Russkaia povest' XIX veka*, Leningrad, 1973.

The second Russian literary encyclopaedia published in 1987,²⁸ another excellent work in many respects, fails to include Russian-Jewish writers in its second, "author part." Isaac Babel, on the other hand, is described as a Russian-Soviet writer. "Russian" in this case signifies "belonging to Russian literature," and in line with this, Bulat Okudzhava, for example, also figures in the book as a Russian-Soviet author. True, the poems he wrote in Russian have indeed little to do with the poet's Georgian origin. Still, Babel belonged also to Jewish literature; at least as much as Ales Adamovich did to Belarusian literature, and the latter fact, however, is not left unmarked. The description of Mendeley Moykher Sforim as a Jewish writer is, on the other hand, fully justified since he wrote in Yiddish. The description of Jewish literature written in Russian (just like the existence of the trend itself) was victim to forced silence during the Soviet era.

More has been written about Russian-Jewish culture recently, especially since the beginning of political changes in 1985. Still, the biographical encyclopaedia *Russkie pisateli 1800–1917*, includes only five of the authors covered in my book, and its entries are unfortunately nothing but variants of the material of the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* published between 1906 and 1913. Apart from the fact that six of "my" 17 authors are "out" as a matter of course, as the encyclopaedia does not deal with authors after 1917, and another 4 of the remaining 11 are left out because the encyclopaedia has been completed only up to the letter "P." Of the seven which still remain, both Aleksandr Kipen and Mordekhai Ben-Ami were ignored; that is how five were left. Even so this is a great step forward after the years of amnesia, although it is a pity that nowhere are they mentioned in their twofold capacity, as Russian-Jewish authors. It is, in general, true that all the literature that is worth mention at all, including the encyclopaedias, keep repeating the old sources, hardly accessible today, and analyze texts in the rarest cases only.

Many works are devoted (imitating Western models) to the issue of anti-Semitism, and even more attempt to clarify historical and sociological problems, and to provide a cultural-historical overview. The number of works actually exploring new material is much smaller but all the more useful. Whenever individual authors are discussed, the centre of the discussion is the ideological "position," world outlook and system of views of the author, and in these investigations the works figure only as mirrors of the author's attitude. The scarcity of sources is so great that sometimes the mere biography of an author

28 *Literaturnyi Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, 1987.

or the cropping up of a single new fact makes news. Practically no one treats the works as aesthetic subjects. Few, if any, analysts approach the topic from that aspect, either because they regard a second-rate literature unworthy of investigation (from an academic viewpoint), or for ideological reasons: they are reluctant or too embarrassed to reach the conclusion in the course of an eventual, objective investigation that a given piece of literature is anything but a masterpiece. Yet Russian-Jewish literature is the manifestation of a special area of consciousness, which can be fit among the universal spiritual values, and its forms of existence determined, via an aesthetic or general investigation of its works of literature. These texts are inaccessible abroad, so this literature is unknown outside Russia—that is something that can be understood. However, it would have remained similarly unknown in Russia too, had Shimon Markish not begun to collect the texts and introduce the authors in the 1980s. He also reached back to the beginning of the 19th century after having studied Babel, Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, then turning to the life-work of the “Big Three” fathers-founders: Osip Rabinovich, Lev Levanda and Grigory Bogrov. It was under his tutelage that a dissertation and two monographs were born in Italy, one on Ben-Ami, another on Aizman, respectively, and a more eclectic introductory overview in the United States.²⁹ To sum up: it remains an indisputable fact that up to very recent times, even highly qualified scholars of Russian studies had no idea about the existence of Russian-Jewish literature.

Jewish literature in another language

There is a host of comprehensive works in which the bulk of Russian-Jewish literature falls within a blank spot. One of the reasons, as has been already pointed out, is that up to the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of Jewish literature was largely synonymous with literature in Hebrew. Even works in Yiddish were often found unworthy by writers of literary history of being included in their academic tomes.

Of the Jewish writers of the end of the 19th century, the Zionists did not believe in the viability of Jewish literature in another language. Ahad Ha'am

²⁹ Salmon, L.: *Una voce del deserto: Ben-Ami, uno scrittore dimenticato*, 1995; Colombo, C. D.: “Ja. Aizman, scrittore dell’ebraismo russo,” *ACME. Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell’Università degli studi de Milano* LXVIII/1 (1995), pp. 93–103; Nakhimovsky, A. S.: *Russian-Jewish Literature and Identity*, 1992.

(Asher Hirsch Ginsberg, 1856–1927) thought in 1896 that Jewish authors writing for Jewish readers in a foreign language were “shutting themselves into a spiritual ghetto.” They would be needed for no longer than a few decades until their people got adapted to the surrounding people. Writers in the national language, however, were also doomed to failure because of the linguistic “situation”: Hebrew is unable to express all that the modern literatures can.³⁰

The issue of literary language usage is being put into a new light by the American scholar Robert Alter. Let us imagine, he suggests, the position of a Jewish author in the second half of the 19th century who wishes to produce literature in Hebrew. In his view, this is something similar as if Defoe or Richardson had tried to write *Robinson Crusoe* or *Pamela* in Latin.³¹

The structuralist linguist Itamar Even-Zohar repeats the commonly held view that Hebrew is the idiom of “high” (educated) literature, while Yiddish, as the language of the lower classes, serves as the vehicle of popular literacy. The two lived together in a symbiosis for centuries.³² It is Yiddish literature, and Yiddish literature only, that evidences some Russian, or on a few occasions, Polish literary influence, but “high” Slavic and Jewish culture came into contact only at the end of the 19th century. Incidentally, Even-Zohar divides Russian-Jewish literature into periods according to cultural dependency: before 1860, “Jewish dependency was characteristic,” which was followed by a “Russified period” lasting until 1920, then by a “Soviet-Russified period” up to 1950, after which came the “decline of dependency.” Perhaps the very vague character of Even-Zohar’s concepts shows, too, that Lvov-Rogachevsky’s periodization is of much more use, even though, similarly to the Marxist method, he equates the milestones of literary history with those at the boundary lines between the periods of socio-cultural evolution. This is somewhat natural in this case; Jews were profoundly affected by the changes of laws that came with the death of the Tsar after 1860 (as they had been suffering ever newer restrictions month after month before,

30 Quoted by Miron, D.: “Modern Hebrew Literature: Zionist Perspectives and Israeli Realities,” *Prooftexts. A Journal of Literary History* 4 (1984), p. 52.

31 “Nineteenth-century writers striving to create a new Jewish culture integral to European modernity conceived a paradoxical project of representing quotidian reality in a language nobody spoke...” (Alter, R.: *The Invention of Hebrew Prose. Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism*, 1988. p. 20.)

32 Even-Zohar, I.: “‘Symbiotic literary polysystem’—Russified Literary Models,” Symposium on The Dynamics of East European Ethnicity Outside of Eastern Europe, Bellagio, Italy, July 1977. The author, through no fault of his own, could have had only very vague information on Russian-Jewish literature in 1977 in Israel.

sometimes to the point where these became impossible to follow), and even more deeply by the government and Church-approved pogroms following the murder of the liberal ruler Alexander II. The literature of the Russian Jewry which, wanted or not, also filled a political role, could not remain indifferent to the general mood of its writers and readers.

The three mother tongues of Russian Jewry

The choice of language of Jewish writers was one of the issues of the heated contemporary debates regarding the language or languages of Russian Jewry, which were flaring in Russian-Jewish periodicals around the time of the 1908 Chernovits language conference. Between 30 August and 3 September 1908, at the initiative of the philosopher and writer Nathan Birnbaum, a conference was staged in Chernovtsy (or, in the Polish spelling, Czernowitz, a town in Bukovina, then under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). The main topic of the conference was the Yiddish language, covering, beside the grammatical and orthographical problems of Yiddish, also the subjects of Yiddish literature, theatre and translation. Also the language of the conference was Yiddish. Practically all the participants were writers, including I. L. Peretz, Sholem Asch, Abraham Reizen and Nomberg. Mendeley Moikher Sforim and Sholom Aleichem were absent because of their illness. The problem of national language unexpectedly turned into the central issue of the conference. One of the camps demanded that Hebrew be recognized as the only Jewish national language, since the use of Yiddish was nothing but one of the miseries of the Diaspora. Their opponents, on the other hand, insisted that a national language must be a living and spoken language, and Hebrew was the language of rituals and the past.³³ According to the theory of the Haskala, the theory of Jewish Enlightenment proposed by Moses Mendelssohn, Yiddish must be replaced by the language of the host country, so Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism would yield its place to a bilingualism of Hebrew and a European language. In Russia, however, the influence of the Haskala, which came late anyway, was limited to a narrow intellectual circle. The process was halted by the pogroms of 1881–1882, which brought disillusionment to the advocates of assimilation who, due to the pogroms and the influence of the national

³³ It has already been mentioned that according to the figures of the 1897 census, 97% of Russia's Jews regarded Yiddish as their mother tongue. Beside Lvov-Rogachevsky, the same figure is quoted in *Budushchnost'* 13 (1900), p. 250.

movements gaining strength all over Europe, as well as on the narodnik model of “going to the people,” much in vogue in Russian intellectual circles, began to seek for their own national framework and roots. These were the circumstances in which the issue of national language came to be raised at the conference. The conflict ended in a compromise resolution: Yiddish was declared to be “a” (one) national language of the Jews (*a natsional shprakh*), the indefinite pronoun allowing the possibility of someone regarding also Hebrew a national language.³⁴

The conference was the antecedent of the scandal that broke out at the Zionist Congress in Hamburg. One of the speakers, lecturing in Yiddish was simply muzzled by the Russian Zionists who prevented him from speaking. The speaker, I. Efren, incidentally a member of the staff of the Jewish paper *Evreiskii Mir*, which was published in Russian, reacted:

I had two choices for speaking in a language that would be understood by the participants of the convention: I could speak either in Russian or in Yiddish. When I preferred the latter, the mother tongue of most of us, I expected no objection, much less a scandal. We shall see if they will have the courage to take the responsibility before the Jewish people for outrageously offending the language in which this people speaks and thinks. Contempt for the language of the people is equal to contempt for the people.³⁵

The crowd was yelling: “This is the answer for Chernovtsi!” The debate brought many interesting views to light, and “the debate over languages” went on for many years. Let me first cite the contribution of Jabotinsky, one of the authors to be discussed in my book:

To what literature should a Jewish writer go to? I am not looking at the problem from the aspect of jargon.³⁶ The language question will not suffice to decide for him where to go, to which literature. [...] Writing in Russian is not the same thing as abandoning Jewish literature. In our complicated times the “nationality” of a work of literature is not determined simply by the language in which it is written.

34 For the literature on the topic, see Samuel, M.: *In Praise of Yiddish*, 1971; Miron, D.: “A Language as Caliban,” *A Traveller Disguised*, ed. Dan Miron, 1973; Rothstein, J.: “Reactions of American Yiddish Press to the Tshernovits Language Conference of 1908,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 13 (1977).

35 Efren, I.: “Evreiskii iazyk pered sudom russkikh sionistov,” *Evreiskii Mir* 2 (1910), columns 41–2.

36 Yiddish was called “jargon” in a derogatory manner in Russia, since the only national language was Hebrew, the ancient language of prayers, signifying the unity of the Jews.

[...] Men of letters writing in Russian may choose Russian readers for their audience, which is a much more attractive proposition, that audience being much greater in number and living more extensive, variegated and richer lives. The temptation is too great. Breaking away from this space, offering perspective, and focusing one's thoughts on the experience of the Jews alone is a sacrifice. [...] On the other hand, anyone who leaves this small hut for the sake of the big ballroom, has thoughts whispering to him that broad is better than narrow, that the universally human (which is how they call what is Russian) is more important than the national, and the interests of a hundred million people are more important than those of five million.³⁷

In connection with the conference and the articles reacting to it, Jabotinsky put forth his view that belonging to Jewish literature was a *matter of choice*.³⁸ This issue was not determined by the origins or language of the author but by his will and his position as to whom he means to write for, and whose spiritual needs he has in mind when writing. Jabotinsky thought that the choice of the Russian language could also mean the abandoning of Jewish literature.

The major role attributed to the use of language by an anonymous author using only his initials is worth noting:

Ancient Hebrew language no longer has an organic relationship with the association and perception processes going on in Jewish minds. Hebrew lost that role a long time ago, and has become completely isolated from Jewish mentality since. The language which unites seven million Jews, which explains and systematizes the matter existing in the mind of the nation, that language has become the Jewish language, the "jargon." It is self-evident that what we are speaking of is not a national mental material given once and for all, but a continuously renewed, changing and developing intellectual and psychological content, the main component of which is the language. In the economy of national thinking the psychological role has been taken over from Old Hebrew by Yiddish.³⁹

According to the article, language—in an interrelationship with consciousness—shapes thinking, culture and national awareness. It is obvious from all

37 Jabotinsky, V.: "O 'evreiaikh v russkoi culture'" [1908], *Izbrannoie*, ed. V. Jabotinsky, Biblioteka-Alia, 1989, pp. 65–6.

38 Cf. Saul Bellow's words about writing in a language other than Yiddish: "We do not make up history and culture. We simply appear, not by our own choice. We make what we can of our condition with the means available. We must accept the mixture as we find it—the impurity of it, the tragedy of it, the hope of it." (*Great Jewish Short Stories*, p. 16)

39 Gg: "Evreiskaia pechat? Natsionalizm i spor o iazykakh," *Novyi Voskhod* 12 (1910), column 11.

this that the author would reject the use of Russian language in literature, or would not consider works written in Russian as Jewish literature. Also An-sky, the author of the world-famous play *The Dybbuk*, which is founded on motifs taken from Jewish folklore (he is present in this book with his prose), made his voice heard in the debate. S. Niger had made the charge against a part of the Jewish intelligentsia that while confessing Yiddish to be their mother-tongue, they use different languages in daily life. An-sky reacted to this in the following way:

The entire history of the Jewish people clearly exemplifies that the national existence of a people is not at all determined by the language. [...] Mr. Niger's remarks are targeted not only at the writers and journalists of Jewish literature but at a far broader circle: at everyone pursuing a free profession. It includes doctors, lawyers, those with degrees in engineering, chemists, industrialists, and so on. All these people joined the ranks of the intelligentsia by having studied in Russian schools and Russian universities, and they made Russian culture their own. They also live their life in that culture as well as making a living, both in the financial and spiritual sense, from that culture. It must not be forgotten that four fifth of our intelligentsia, if not more, works on the ground of Russian culture: they are clerks in a *zemstvo*, pursue lawsuits at Russian courts, have jobs in Russian factories with Russian workers, etc.

An-sky observes that "the cultural needs of this intelligentsia are met not by Jewish but Russian, Polish, German and other cultures." The nation will return to its language only when it returns to national existence. That, however, requires the cultural soil which is missing for the time being. To act for the sake of return to Jewish existence is possible only in the language which is understood by this intelligentsia, and, low and behold, even Mr Niger himself wrote and published his article in Russian, An-sky argues.⁴⁰

A year later, the world famous author of *History of the Jews*, Simon Dubnow, made his own rather extensive contribution to the debate:

The multi-lingual character of contemporary Jewish literature is a sore spot in every thinking Jew's mind. The ever-intensifying process in the course of which Russian Jewry is losing its national language and popular language is worrying.

⁴⁰ His article, "Creative and Spoken-language Nationalism," was written in reply to an article by the Yiddish critic S. Niger (the pen-name of Shmuel Chorneyi, 1883–1955). The article appeared in *Evreiskoie Obozreniie* because *Evreiskii Mir* had been banned by the authorities. S. An-sky: "Tvorcheskii razgovornyi natsionalizm," *Evreiskoie Obozreniie* 7 (1910).

This process began half a century ago in the ranks of the progressive intelligentsia, and advances spontaneously year after year since. We must struggle against this national disaster, against all kinds of assimilation, with all our might. But we are aware of what we have achieved so far... we know that in the broad circles of society... Russian will remain the tool of Jewish literature for a long time to come. We shall be compelled for a long time to pursue the fight for the national idea most intensively in this medium, in the language which we have learned here; we shall have to propagate the necessity of the knowledge of the Jewish language by the aid of the Russian language. We will advocate the increasing use of the Jewish language in its competition with Russian, but... if the audience reading in Russian begins to decline, and will have no suitable alternative, then that will be a real national disaster. [...] It took half a century for one of the strong weapons of Jewish culture, Jewish Russian literature [*sic*], to get ready and to perfect itself. This weapon now serves to arm the people, and strengthens the nation for its fight for survival. Only our enemies or those with a false vision of the people's interests may suggest that we should let go of this weapon now. No, we will use this weapon as long as it is needed, and will store it away only when the ideal "final day" has come, when our united people has a unified language.⁴¹

Dubnow's prestige was something acknowledged not only by his comrades-in-arms (those advocating national-cultural autonomy in the circumstances of the Diaspora) but also by his opponents (Zionists, and the supporters of all kinds and degrees of assimilation), and they also listened to him. Dubnow recognized the unquestionable importance of the "national language," Old Hebrew, as well as the cultural significance of the "popular language," that is, Yiddish. But it seems even more important that he spoke in defence of Russian, the third, "external" language.

"Evidently, if the conditions are equal, the national content has a greater value in national clothing than in a foreign one, thus it is more valuable in our own language than in that of the host people. But when the contents are not of equal rank, then we probably have to prefer the foreign attire."⁴² The importance of the Russian language for Russian Jews had been recognized by some authors before Dubnow already. The view that Russian was more important than the "jargon" could also be read in the pages of *Evreiskii Mir*.⁴³ Some even suggested that the mother tongue of the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia was

41 Dubnow, S.: "Mysli o russko-evreiskoi zhurnalistike. Po povodu eiiao ptidesiatiletiia 1860-1910," *Evreiskii Mir* 16 (1911), columns 43-4.

42 Ibid., column 45.

43 See e.g. the article on "The Language Problem" published under the name "Eremiia N-skii," *Evreiskii Mir* 1910. 15-16. columns 6-10.; 1910. 2., column 41.; 1910. 6. columns 14-15.

Russian rather the “jargon.”⁴⁴ The Narodnik ethnographer and journalist Lev Sternberg (1861–1927) wrote in *Novyi Voskhod*: “From a sociological point of view it is completely irrelevant which language will gain the upper hand, Russian or Yiddish, since Jews can create Jewish value also in Russian.”⁴⁵ The writer and sociologist Sara Rabinovich (1880–?) argues in a subtler manner:

The cultural threat of learning the Russian language consists precisely in the fact that for us, Russian is not a foreign language, and that we cannot confront it with a national language; on the contrary, we must use it as our mother tongue. We must get immersed in its wealth and depths, so that we can express the totality of our life in it, and we cannot afford not to have this wealth associated with the culture of the Russian people in our minds. We must not allow this association to deprive us of the possibility of putting our spiritual life in its entirety into words. This would lead to a process whereby every step we take in our development dissolves us more in the people in whose language we express that development.⁴⁶

What is quite evidently common in these views is the concern that Russian would drive out Yiddish, and turn into the universal language of Russian Jews; it would be adopted as both their spoken language and the language of their art.

Important observations were made on the cultural identity of the Jewish intelligentsia by Iosif Bikerman (1867–1945), a journalist with progressive views, who often got into debates with both Zionists and autonomists. He wrote an essay for a collection of papers published by *Evreiskii Mir* in 1910, which was directly followed by a piece arguing against him by Aaron Perelman. In the part devoted to the language issue, Bikerman observes that for a people to lose its language is generally equal to national demise, but this does not apply to the Jewish people which “has got emancipated from the language” in order to survive. In his view, the “jargon” is not a national language, only “the language of the lower classes” (*prostorechie*), and what awaits Russian Jewry is linguistic Russification. He goes on:

No matter how rapidly Jewish national culture might develop under the new historical conditions, the Jews will never be the closed, separate nation that they once

⁴⁴ Ibid. 1910. no. 21, column 3.

⁴⁵ L. S-g.: “Besedy s chitateliami,” *Novyi Voskhod* 14–5 (1911), column 10. *Novyi Voskhod* was the most influential St. Petersburg Jewish journal, the continuation of the “old” *Voskhod*.

⁴⁶ Rabinovich, S.: “Evreiskaia khrestomatiia na russkom iazyke,” *Evreiskii Mir* 9 (1911), columns 16–7.

were [...] It is also clear that Jewish culture cannot be the same thing for Jews as French culture is for the French, and Jews will not be a nation in the same sense as the Germans or the French are... They do not live in their own state but in different states, so the Jewish people is necessarily pervaded with the cultures of these states... This, however, does not mean that we are condemned to a schizophrenic existence. *This is not a state of being split but one of being doubled in value.* The elemental growth of the mighty Russian state and the elemental power of the Jewish people scattered around the world, Peter the First and the Maccabees, the figures of Herzen and the Prophet Isaiah exist side by side in pairs in my mind, rising above other contents existing in this world, standing closer to me because they are mine—and there is nothing perverse about this, it is only a little complex, but complexity is universally characteristic of the mind of modern man.⁴⁷

It is here that one witnesses the sudden change in the self-esteem of Jewish writers from a negative into a positive one: they suddenly see their duality as an advantage rather than a drawback. The American Jewish writer in the 20th century already regards his duality as a genuine blessing, a fundamental experience that acts as a stimulus upon his work. He says, “Lucky me, I’m a neurotic, lucky me, I suffer from a dual identity”⁴⁸—since multiculturalism has become a special value by now.

Political factors also had an influence on the complicated relationship between languages. In the 1890s, for instance, the incipient Zionist movement preferred Russian because they thought it was the best temporary solution for squeezing out Yiddish, and for changing over to Hebrew as the next step. (Their influence was strongest in Odessa and St. Petersburg.) The Bund, the Jewish workers’ party, on the other hand, was using Yiddish in order to win over broader masses to its cause, especially in regions unaffected by assimilation (Byelorussia, Lithuania, Poland). Yiddish was, at least for a while, permitted by the Soviet Union, but Hebrew was banned all along, because the latter was seen as the chief bearer of the unity, traditions and religion of the Jews (a role about which I shall have more to say later on).

47 Bikerman, I.: “Natsionalism i natsia,” *Theoreticheskiye i prakticheskiye voprosy evreiskoi zhizni*, n.d. [1910]. The italics are mine. In the original the italicized sentence reads: “Ne razdvoennost’, a udvoenneost’.”

48 Shaked, G.: “Shadows of Identity: German-Jewish and American-Jewish Literature—A Comparative Study,” *Handbook of American-Jewish Literature*. ed. L. Fried. 1988. p. 410. Shaked shows how for American Jewish writers—Malamud, Bellow and especially Philip Roth—their sense of dual identity, which was still a tragedy for German writers, changed into something they took advantage of.

The basic idea of dual cultural bond, or as Kaplan's book put it, "dual affiliation" or "double civilization,"⁴⁹ or "living in two civilizations" was raised already by research done in the United States. "The vicissitudes of history have brought it about that the average human being has to draw upon two civilizations to obtain all those values which he requires for his self-realization as a human being. /.../ This business of living in two civilizations may call for new powers of mind and heart, and to that extent may mark an advance in man's development."⁵⁰ The two decades separating the two observations, Bikerman's and Kaplan's from one another (1910 and 1934), had, to all intents and purposes, decided the issue of the Russification, or rather Sovietization, of Russian Jews.

The concept of Russian-Jewish literature and Jewish literature in another language

While in the foregoing, upon reviewing Jewish literature, it was argued that a single literature existed in several languages, we should now try to consider that *Russian-Jewish literature is also two literatures existing in a single language at the same time*. Shimon Markish defines the concept of Jewish literature written in the language of the host majority by the following conditions:⁵¹

1. Nathan Birnbaum's criterion: owing to his freely and *deliberately chosen national-cultural identity*, the writer creates his works with full national awareness. The latter must not be confused with the kind of "national feeling which has not become a national cause," because "national feeling is only the consequence or reflection of national unity, but never its foundation."

2. The Jewish writer is *connected by his roots inherently to Jewish civilization*, which he also draws upon for his motifs in the broadest sense of the term. Whatever views he should profess concerning his material, his basic stance is always evaluation from inside; this is what differentiates it from the works of non-Jewish authors on Jewish themes, for instance, regardless of the views they propose.

49 Kaplan, M. M.: *Judaism as Civilization*. 1934 (citations are from the 2nd ed., Philadelphia, 1981, p. 216).

50 Kaplan, M. M.: *The Future of the American Jew*. 1948. pp. 99-100.

51 Markish, Sh.: "Russko-evreiskaia literatura: predmet, podkhody, otsenky," *Novoie literaturnoe obrozheniie* 15 (1995), p. 220.

3. The writer is *a social representative of his community*. He stands for his community or its majority. If, for any reason, he has denied this community, or its religion or national culture, or is opposed to it, then he does not belong to the sphere of Jewish literature. Being a Jewish writer is a matter of choice.

4. From the second half of the 19th century on, the idea of the doubly affiliated (in our case Russian-Jewish) writer gains importance, who is attached to two cultures to the same degree, and whose works belong to the literature of two cultures: to Jewish literature and to that of the host country (the Russian expression that is used is *okruzhaiushchee bol'shinstvo*, meaning "the surrounding majority"), in the language of which he writes. (See Bikerman's above cited remark on being doubled rather than split.)

It is worthwhile to take a closer look at these criteria and to cast more light on them by the use of a few examples. What is formulated in the first point does not lend itself easily to interpretation since "national feeling which has not become a national cause" is not an exact definition. What is obvious is that being a Jewish writer is the result of a conscious choice and an undertaking. A Jewish (born) writer who cannot, *by the evidence of his works*, be recognized as a Jewish writer, cannot be regarded as a Jewish writer either. Jabotinsky is evidently a Jewish writer, while Kafka is not, although the latter is a subject of interesting debates. An author writing in German, Franz Kafka never broke his ties with Jewry. On the basis of the above criteria, however, his works do not belong to Jewish literature, because they do not formulate "the universally human" by drawing on the culture of Jews and along with it the problems of Jews. Robert Alter raises the issue whether in Kafka's great works the paradigm of the outcast did not emerge owing to his being Jewish. "If modern literature in general is a literature that adopts the viewpoints of the outsider, Kafka as the alienated member of an exiled people, is the paradigmatic modernist precisely because he is the paradigmatic Jew."⁵² Reformulating Alter's observation, I have already made mention of the circumstance that modern literature or the modern *Weltgefühl*, the typical mood and mentality of the 20th century, shows a number of features in common with the psychological condition of Jews on the road to assimilation. Alter does not regard Kafka's belonging to Jewish literature as evident either: "What Kafka's imaginative intimacy with the Jewish past did was to give a special shape to

⁵² Alter, R.: "Jewish Dreams and Nightmares," *After the Tradition: Essays on Modern Jewish Writing*, 1969, p. 27.

the imagery and a particular sharpness to the edge of feeling in his work, but the work is surely not intended as a representation of the Jewish experience.”⁵³ He deems the views of critics who think to discover the Wandering Jew in the protagonist of *The Hunter Gracchus*, or consider the search for a home of Zionism as the main idea underlying *The Castle*, far-fetched.⁵⁴ At the same time, however, “certain fundamental aspects of traditional Jewish culture continue to live a kind of ghostly afterlife among Jews in the process of assimilating into a different culture,” Robert Alter writes. “And so Kafka, the Germanophone Czech ended up creating at least a few texts that sound as if [they were] invented by an 18th century Polish Jewish mystic or even by a creator of a Rabbinical Midrash in 5th century Palestine.”⁵⁵

Kafka’s parables have no unambiguous, easy-to-translate morals. *A Report to an Academy* cannot be narrowed down to an allegory of assimilation, even though the author’s private experiences regarding assimilation clearly must have had a part in his capturing the “ghetto-feeling” and that of being encaged. It is also a fact of literary history that the work itself was published in the pages of *Der Jude*, Martin Buber’s paper.

When discussing Kafka, the issue of his Jewishness cannot be evaded. Even in full knowledge of the literature, the main problem remains why the author’s affiliation is *not* manifest in Kafka’s novels. What all analysts must acknowledge as an answer is that the author wanted to articulate his views differently, in a universal way, and wanted to articulate something else. If anyone thinks Kafka’s works mirror Jewish problems and characteristics, then this argument should be, on the one hand, made on the strength of an analysis of the texts—I have yet to see an analysis proving this point—and, on the other, the question raised above still could not be set aside. Should “Jewish parables” be discovered in his works, then the analogous question will instantly be raised whether all authors using parables from, or a system of references based on, the New Testament should then be classified automatically as “Christian writers”? Arguments that Kafka is attached by his mentality, psychological make-

⁵³ Ibid., p. 30.

⁵⁴ Not only Zionism but also Jewish traditions turn up in analyses of the works of Kafka. For example, “*Chateau*, roman construit sur la structure de la quête des contes hassidiques, mais débouchant sur l’absence de sens du monde.” (“The Castle is built upon the structure of search of Hassidic fairy-tales but reveals the senselessness of the world.”) Bechtel, D.: “Les écrivains juifs allemands et la ‘Volkskunde’: culture, littérature et nationalisme,” *Pardès* 21 (1995). *Littérature et judéité dans les langues européennes. Sous la direction de Henri Raczymow*, 1955.

⁵⁵ Alter, R.: “The Jewish Voice,” *Commentary* (October 1995), p. 42.

up or character to Jewry raise questions that are very hard to prove and are based on vague categories.⁵⁶

An author's belonging to Jewish literature is decided neither by descent nor by private behaviour, and the evidence of letters is not decisive either. Still, during the 20th century, the crucial question as to who is to be regarded as Jewish is continuously being raised also in connection with the definition of Jewish literature. This complex question cannot be answered once and for all by scientific definitions (it may be most reasonable to leave it to individual choice, but this cannot be made universal for the time being by anyone). The past few years have seen some remarkable attempts at an approximate theoretical definition. Iukhneva proposes the introduction of the term and category "sub-ethnic/sub-ethnicity," and suggests no less than the assumption that acculturation paves the way not for assimilation (assimilation being, in her view, synonymous with conversion to Christianity), but a certain "sub-ethnic" state in which Russian Jews turn into native Russian-speaking Jews with a dual culture.⁵⁷ Sometimes even writers end up contradicting themselves when trying to deal with the complex problem of where they belong by right of their work. Cynthia Ozick, whom we have mentioned before, confesses:

[T]he writer is not a religious thinker, or a philosopher... to be a writer is to be a autodidact... especially as a Jew I am an autodidact, the synagogue at present does not speak to me, and I have no divine shelter other than reading, at the moment print is all my Judaism. [...] In all of history the literature that lasted or Jews has been liturgical. The secular Jew is a figment, when a Jew becomes a secular person, he is no longer a Jew.⁵⁸

Neither the "internal" conditions of the Jews nor the external ones of "the world" seem to obey Cynthia Ozick's contention, its authenticity notwithstanding.

A positive example for the second condition of the Russian-Jewish writer is An-sky who switched languages twice during his literary career, and created works of equal value both in Yiddish and Russian. His roots and his outlook on the world bound him to Jewry in whichever language he wrote. His world

56 E.g. Stora-Sandor, J.: "Kafka és a zsidó humor," *Szombat* (October 1994), pp. 31–35.

57 N. Iukhneva in her lecture "Russkie evreii v XX veke: osobennosti etnicheskogo razvitiia," held at the ICEES CI World Congress, Tampere, Finland, 2 August, 2000.

58 Ozick, C.: "Toward Yawneh," *Judaism* 19 (Summer 1970), pp. 266, 272.

famous drama *The Dybbuk* was written originally in Russian.⁵⁹ Ilya Ehrenburg may be the opposite example. Ehrenburg grew up in an environment where Jewish traditions were no longer a living presence. He never denied his origins; in fact he was ready to fill the role of something of a “Jew for show” in the Soviet Union. His literary works, however, do not belong to Jewish literature. He only wrote a work or two in the 1920s in connection to which the question of dual bond may be raised (*Lasik Roitschwantz, A Street in Moscow*).

An interesting example for the third condition may be Grigory Kanovich (b. 1929), a Jewish writer in Lithuania writing in Russian, who kept on speaking for his community even when it had shrunk to near extinction and practically lost its identity. Kanovich continued to write stubbornly about the Jewish past even in the Soviet period of total amnesia, and agreed to emigrate only in 1993. He is living Israel today. When, in an interview, he was asked if there was such a thing as Russian-Jewish literature, he replied: “If an author writing about Jewish themes in Russian does not belong to Russian literature, he is worth nothing. If you are called a writer writing in Russian, and not a Russian writer, then you are not accepted in your own home, and you are not a writer at all. Language is what determines ‘nationality’, not descent.” The title of the interview is “I consider myself a Russian writer...”⁶⁰

Vladimir Voinovich, who has never dealt with Jewish themes, talks about himself in a similar manner. He exemplifies the mixture of many nationalities in Russian literature, as well as the fact that during the Soviet period, minority cultures very rarely had a chance to survive. He is also another example of the view that belonging to a national literature is a matter of choice: “I was born on September 26, 1931, in the city of Dushanbe, the capital of Tadzhikistan... By nationality my mother was a Jew and my father a Russian of Serb origin. Once a lady of Russian-Tatar origin, a Parisian, having learned about my roots, was amazed and asked me how I could consider myself a Russian writer. I answered I did not consider myself a Russian writer, I was a Russian writer.”⁶¹

One of the Israeli experts of Jewish literature in Russian, Efraim Sicher simply ignores the problem, and the very title of his book, *Jews in Russian Lit-*

59 *Evreiskaia Zhizn'*, 3 January 1916. See also Markish, Sh., *Evreiskii Zhurnal* 2 (1991), p. 61. The original manuscript came to light after 80 years in 2001. On this, see also Petrovsky-Shtern, Y.: “Russkii Dybbuk: Obrazy i perevoploshcheniia,” *Yehupets* 10 (2002), pp. 167–83.

60 Kanovich, G.: “Shchitaiu seb'a russkim pisatelem,” *Voprosy Literatury* 7–8 (2003), pp. 206, 207.

61 Voinovich, V.: “Korotko o sebe,” *Antisovetskii Sovetskii Soiuz*, Ann Arbor, Ardis, 1985, p. 5.

erature after the October Revolution,⁶² indicates his starting point, namely that the Jewishness of writers is given due to their origin, and what is common in them is that they write in Russian. Under that common title he discusses the work of Babel, Mandelstam, Pasternak and Ehrenburg, disregarding the fact that Mandelstam and Pasternak come very close to what is described as *jüdische Selbsthass*,⁶³ Jewish self-hatred. Sicher also ignores the self-description of the writers themselves. Mandelstam did not feel he belonged among the Jews. He was even baptized in 1911. Jewish culture is not a definitive element of his poetry, and even when it is present, as an occurrence, it is of equal rank as Christian or antique culture. Evoking childhood memories of visits to his grandparents, he writes:

All the elegant mirage of St. Petersburg was merely a dream, a brilliant covering thrown over the abyss, while round about there sprawled the chaos of Judaism—not a motherland, not a hearth, but precisely the chaos, the unknown womb whence I had issued, which I feared, about which I made vague conjectures and fled, always fled... [T]he strange, cheerless holidays, grating upon the ear, with harsh names: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. [...] As a little bit of mush fills the entire house, so the last influence of Judaism overflows one's life. O what a strong smell that is! Could I possibly not notice that in real Jewish houses there was a different smell from that in Aryan houses? [...] Books on the lower shelf, the Judaic chaos thrown into the dust.⁶⁴

Pasternak attributed extreme importance to his special, intimate relationship with the Russian Eastern Church. He was also baptized, and did not feel Jewish. This is unambiguously evidenced not only by his letters but his works as well. In the pages of *Doctor Zhivago* Pasternak points out that he regards the presence of Jewry in the 20th century as anachronistic. Zhivago's Jewish friend, Misha Gordon, speculates on the Jewish question at the age of eleven:

62 Sicher, E.: *Jews in Russian Literature after the October Revolution. Writers and Artists between Hope and Apostasy*, Cambridge, 1995.

63 The psychology and phenomenon of "Jewish self-hatred" was raised first by Theodor Lessing in his book *Der Jüdische Selbsthass* (Berlin, 1930). See also Mayer, H.: "Jüdischer Selbsthass," in his *Aussenreiter*. 1975, pp. 414–21; Gilman, S.: *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the hidden language of the Jews*. 1986.

64 Mandelstam, O.: *The Noise of Time and Other Prose Pieces*, trans. C. Brown, 1988. Or a different translation: *The Prose of Osip Mandelstam*, 1965. In Russian: Mandelshtam, O.: "Shum vremeni," *Izbrannyye proizvedeniia v 3-kh tomakh*, eds. G. P. Struve and B. A. Filippov, 1971, 2nd ed., vol. 2., p. 55.

“What did it mean to be a Jew? What was the purpose of it? What was the reward or the justification of this unarmed challenge which brought nothing but grief?” Gordon later moves on to a Christian phase, and believes that the Gospels call out to individuals beyond nations: “[W]hy do not they [the intellectual leaders of the Jewish people] say to the Jews: that is enough, stop now. Do not hold on to your identity, do not act together in a crowd. Disperse. Be with all the rest. You are the first and best Christians in the world.”⁶⁵ Researchers do not have the right, either human or scientific, to “re-classify” Pasternak as a Jewish writer. In a lesser-known letter, Pasternak writes to Gorky:

Mine is a hateful and difficult lot. You know my father, so I have to say no more about that. Based on what I was born into, with all the circumstances of my childhood, my affection, my gifts and my attractions, I should not have been born Jewish. For me, this would not have changed anything. I would have been neither more nor less because of that. But how freely I could let myself go! [...] I have to restrain myself in everything. [...] Anti-Semitism has avoided me so far; I have never experienced it. All that makes me complain is that I am compulsively being tethered by threads that I tie upon myself permanently, by my own accursed but free will. The false opinions and imagined or genuine rumours, the emergence of which is made easier by my origin, do not deserve speaking about. [...] My life is very easy, maybe undeservedly so, but at the root of my inner self-restraint, the causes of which I have just confessed to you, there may be my extreme inclination toward speculation.⁶⁶

A part of the analysts, similarly to Sicher, make efforts to classify all writers of Jewish origin as belonging to Jewish literature, no matter how far they are from Judaism and how distant they grew from the Jews as a people. For that purpose they try, in a highly intuitive process, to make use of vague, practically indefinable terms such as “Jewish mentality,” “Jewish character,” “Jewish sensibility,” or “Jewish humor” (see the debate on Kafka).

The above issues (subject to debate up to this day) are being raised every now and then ever since the early 20th century both by the assimilated Jewish writers themselves who have lived between the constantly changing frontiers of the countries of East and Central Europe, and by their analysts.

65 Pasternak, B.: *Doctor Zhivago*, trans. Max Hayward and Manya Harari. 1958 (4th impression: 1961).

66 Pasternak, B.: *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 5, 1992, pp. 238–9.

If we set aside the assimilation processes, differing by region, as well as historical and sociological studies, and look for different theoretical viewpoints more literary in character, then the categories of comparative literature may offer some orientation. But when looking for terminological foundations in Dionys Đurisin's basic work,⁶⁷ upon reaching the concept of "two-home status (*đvojdomnost*)" we find that Jewish literature is a special exception even among dual-awareness and minority literatures in the Central European context, or "geotext." The analogy fails to work. After all, what kind of a *dom*, what "home," "motherland" or "country" was Russia to the writers discussed in this book? It is worth while to examine in greater detail what framework Đurisin's theory might offer with regard to our topic.

Đurisin writes, "Regarding relationships within a national literature it may be assumed that the process of the realization of the relationship is an organic one, since it entails the synthesis and mutual influence of the same structure, i.e. the national literature." As we shall see, in our case it is not so, since Russian-Jewish literature is not backed by an organic national literature or, as Đurisin puts it, one "interpreted as a single historical unit." Russian-Jewish literature is a special, encapsulated foreign body, a thing apart, whose relationships to the two cultures can be revealed by detailed analysis only. Russian-Jewish literature is a "comparatistic" phenomenon by its very nature, with the paradoxical difference that in the absence of connection to *any* national literature, or rather because of that absence, it has been excluded from world literature. A major evidence is that in the case of Russian-Jewish literature the kind of influence analysis suggested by Đurisin cannot even come into question (Russian-Jewish literature had no influence either on contemporary Jewish literature(s) or Russian literature; any influence remained within the trend itself, for which many examples will be shown in this book), since the works themselves were largely unknown and isolated.

Đurisin distinguishes four types of synthetic literary groups covering several literatures:

1. ethnically related peoples living in the same state (e.g. Czech + Slovak, Russian + Ukrainian);
2. ethnically related peoples not living in the same state (e.g. Germanic or Slavic literature);

67 Đurisin, D.: *Theory of Literary Comparatistics*, 1984.

3. literatures of ethnically unrelated peoples living in a common state (e.g. Slovak-Hungarian, Hungarian-South Slavic) [as a matter of fact, the tri-lingual literature of Switzerland is, to my mind, a better example—Zs. H.];

4. regional literatures (Carpathian Basin, East European literature, Scandinavian literature, etc.).

In theory, Russian-Jewish literature should fall into Category Three. To prove why, it nevertheless would require a complete essay. Let it suffice to point out that in order to keep to the analogy, a decades long trend should be found, covering a number of Slovak authors who, while keeping their Slovak identity, want to assimilate to the Hungarians, and for this reason, deliberately choose Hungarian for the language of their works. If we were to try to fit Russian-Jewish literature into Category Four, then, on the other hand, proof of “economic, ideological and political community” ought to be found, which would be extremely difficult.

Đurisin’s method is not suited for the definition of Russian-Jewish literature, simply because the most fundamental issue underlying the entire phenomenon is the problem of assimilation, one that does not arise in the above listed categories, since it is not a phenomenon of literary history but one of history and sociology. According to Đurisin, however, problems of “sociology, politics, religion, psychology, etc.” must not be involved in the sphere of “comparatistics.” Division according to the language issue, however, is considered too broad by him (in the case of what are now routinely called “Francophone” literatures), and the only feature on the strength of which Russian-Jewish literature might fit into that subcategory would be its bilingual character. The main problem is that in our case, the relationship, unusually for comparative literature, is *not bilateral*, a feature characterizing not only Russian-Jewish but also “X (any)-Jewish” literature, namely Jewish literature written in any country and language, or maybe an even more universal phenomenon.

In East Europe, one of the fundamental experiences of the rising national movements of the 19th century was that a nation lives in its language. However, in the shadow of emergent modern anti-Semitism, linguistic self-awareness and revival were incapable of securing a place for the Jewish intelligentsia which had begun to move on and assimilate under the influence of the Haskala. The modernization of the Russian literary language had been accomplished by Pushkin a mere 40 years before Jewish literature written in Russian emerged within this Russian literature, and not even the self-perception of Russians, looking upon themselves as a great nation (with pan-Slavic tendencies), was yet able to cope with the new phenomenon of others

writing in the same language with a different national awareness in their mind.⁶⁸

The parallel phenomena of multi-language East and Central European Jewish literature deserve special research and analysis going far beyond the scope of this book. We have to stay content with occasional references to specific works. The works of Ivan Olbracht, Bruno Schultz in Poland, David Albahari in Serbia, Danilo Kiš, who called himself “the last Yugoslav,” and others in Hungary (like Mihály Kornis or Miklós Vámos) may be ranked on the strength of certain parallels, influences or inter-textual connections, moreover the parallels may be extended even to include American Jewish literature (Henry Roth, Michael Gold, Daniel Fuks and others).⁶⁹ To investigate these influences and parallels may not only be interesting and fruitful for the production theories but will also substantiate the need for the study of Russian-Jewish literature as a special area of scholarship.

Religion—nation—culture

Recently the organizer of the first Jewish Writers’ Conference “Kisufim” in Jerusalem, answered the question as to what makes a text Jewish as follows: “A Jewish writer is a writer whose mother is Jewish.”⁷⁰ This repeats the Hala-hic point of view of Judaism. But from the above outlined criteria it can be

68 In Hungarian culture, the phenomenon of having dual roots appears to have been more easily understood than by those living in the midst of Russian culture. The reason is clearly to be found in the differences of the process of assimilation. Dr. Mátyás Eisler, Chief Rabbi of the town of Kolozsvár, wrote as early as 1926: “a work can be classified as Jewish literature only if it has a Jewish topic and its author is Jewish... while the language of the work does not matter at all...” (*Magyar Zsidó Szemle* [1926], pp. 142, 144, 145, 152). In an article entitled “On the Concept of Jewish Literature,” Vilmos Bacher explained that the language of Jewish literature is, beside Hebrew, every language in which Jewish thoughts are being expressed. When a writer uses another language, and his work is in no relationship with Jewry, then one cannot, even for the sake of increasing the glory of Jewish literature, classify this work as Jewish literature. He refers to the example of the Minnesänger Süßkind von Trimberg, who may be mentioned in a Jewish historical treatise but cannot be regarded as a part of Jewish literature (Bacher, Vilmos: “A zsidó irodalom fogalmáról,” *Magyar Zsidó Almanach* [1911], pp. 193–4). Markish also makes mention of this essay: Markish, S.: “À propos de l’histoire et de la méthodologie de l’étude de la littérature juive d’expression russe,” *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* XXVI/2 (Avril-Juin 1985), p. 149.

69 See the last chapter of the book, and my article: Hetényi, Zs.: “The Child’s Eye: Isaac Babel’s innovations in narration in Russian-Jewish, American and European Literary Context.” Contributions to the Conference “*The Enigma of Isaac Babel*”, 2007.

70 The Jerusalem Post UP Front, April 20, 2007. p. 28.

concluded that being Jewish and a writer do not necessary qualify an author as a Jewish writer in the sense that his works are to be regarded as belonging to Jewish (e.g. Russian-Jewish) literature. However, without venturing into areas I am largely unfamiliar with—and interfering in the business of historians, sociologists, cultural anthropologists or even politicians—I nevertheless had to set up a working hypothesis-type definition of Jewishness for the purposes of my book.

“Jewish peoplehood finds expression in a tradition, in a way of life, in milieu and in specific sights and sounds. If Judaism is to be more than a memory of ancient glory, or more than a way of speaking, it must consist of things that are visible, audible and tangible. The sum of all that is recognizable as belonging to Judaism makes of it a civilization.” Mordecai Kaplan questions even the notion of nation applied to Jews, and he proposes “peoplehood” instead, for introducing later his term of “civilization”:

A civilization, as modern nationalism might define it, is looking and acting like others. But as a humanizing process, a civilization is the cumulative heritage of knowledge, experience and attitudes acquired by the successive generations of a people in its striving to achieve salvation. That heritage links the generations together into a continuing unity. It consists of a variety of elements; memories of the people's past and hopes concerning its future; a particular language and literature; specific laws, morals, customs and folkways; evaluations of life and an assortment of art forms. Various items are chosen from each of these elements and are made the object of special regard and reverence; they are treated as sacred. Taken in their entirety those items constitute the religion, or the religious aspect of the civilization. (...) ...the most unreliable and unprocurable are the statistics concerning Jews. The main reason, of course, is that Jews do not know what makes them Jews. For fear of being misunderstood, they dare not use the traditional term “nation.” For fear of being discriminated against they avoid the term “race.” For lack of a category that properly describes them, they answer to the term “religion” merely because they know no other. But, paradoxically, most of them are not affiliated with any Jewish religious body. They do not actually know what differentiates them from their fellow Americans.⁷¹

After having read numerous theoretical studies, I put myself the question as to how to at least approximate the idea of the 20th century Jew and, within that, the Russian Jew? It was while pondering this question that I came across an essay on the definition of “Belgianness,” which took its start from the mul-

71 Kaplan, M. M.: *The Future of the American Jew*, 1948. pp. 94, 93, 97.

titude of identities of Jews in the 20th century in its discussion of the many variants of being Belgian.⁷²

It is well known that the idea of a Belgian nation is itself a highly complex one, depending on the self-definition of Walloons and Flemings. The many kinds of Belgian people include a host of different kinds of Jews as well: Sephardic and Ashkenazi, Orthodox, Hassidic and modern, believer and non-believer, atheist, self-hater, leftist, rightist, doubter, intellectual, non-political, active and passive, oriental, old and new immigrant, and so an and so forth—and all these people also consider themselves, and are being considered, as Belgians... These Jewish types are all products of the Haskala, the Jewish enlightenment, the fruits and controversial consequences of which became fully ripened by the 20th century. The “Jewishness” of a writer, for me, is determined by three elements: the word “Jewish” may signify *religious*, *national* and *cultural* identity, and the mixture of these elements in different proportions may produce countless variants,⁷³ and forms of appearance, not excluding the lack of, or complete dominance of one element either. Still, on the issue of the criteria I must add that these were the ones that, to me, seemed to provide a practical framework for deciding whom to include in the book, and whom not to. These approaches, however, were established in order not only to create points of reference for others but also as a starting point. The greatest shortcoming of categories is exactly that they are too categorical; without categories, however, any definition remains fuzzy and unscientific.

The migrant and hybrid existence “born of ethnic, cultural and linguistic cross-fertilization” (to use the key terms of Salman Rushdie’s essays), leaving one’s psycho-cultural homeland, and then searching for it anew, has become a fundamental paradigm for human existence by the end of the 20th century. Looked at from that perspective, the temporary concepts of Russian-Jewish literature may serve as a starting-point for the terminology of the description of contemporary literature, compared to which the phenomenon of Conrad’s

72 Kribus, Serge: “De tous les peuples de la Gaule, les Belges juifs sont les plus braves,” *Belgique toujours grande et belle*, eds. Antoine Pickels and Jacques Sojcher, Revue de l’Université de Bruxelles, Éditions Complexe, 1988, pp. 344–8.

73 The number of variants is sociologically indeterminable. Let us play a little with the idea... Purely mathematically, the percentage variants of these three elements total more than 5000. If we try to calculate in decimals (for example, absurd as it may seem, one may assume as something of model that in the “complete” structure of a personality the religious element makes up five-tenths, four-tenths is the share of the national and the remaining one-tenth is the cultural element), we still get at least 100 variants.

and Nabokov's writing in English, or Ionesco's writing in French, seems almost unproblematic.

My experience is that it is more practical to apply the criteria relating to Russian-Jewish literature, as described above, to individual works rather than to authors. In that way we may be better able to avoid forcing artists, who went through various changes during their career themselves, into rigid categories, and sacrificing to theory more subtle shades which ought to be subject to literary analysis. On the other hand, whether any particular work complies with the above criteria and whether or not it belongs to Russian-Jewish literature or Jewish literature written in any language, can be quite clearly and definitely decided. It was, of course, only in the 20th century that all this became so endlessly complicated. The majority of the writers in this book may be called Russian-Jewish writers because they wrote exclusively or mostly works belonging to Russian-Jewish literature.

I. “TURBULENT TIMES”—THE UTOPIA OF ASSIMILATION

The Jewish Haskala and Russian reforms: the start of acculturation

After the French Revolution, the following famous declaration was made in the French Convent by Stanislas Clermont-Ferrand: “One must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation, but one must give them everything as individuals; they must become citizens.” This was said at about the same time as the so-called Pale of Settlement was being established in Russia, the area in which Jews were permitted to settle, in the border regions which, after the three partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, 1795) fell within the country’s frontiers along with their more than a million strong Jewish population.¹ The idea that they might become “citizens” did not even come into question, especially as the concept of the citizen (*citoyen*) developed in a highly peculiar and controversial manner in East Europe. The absence of a strong middle class was only one element of the oft-mentioned economic and historical backwardness or arrested development of Eastern Europe and Russia. Russia was populated not by citizens but by subjects, and only a few intellectuals looking far ahead into the future were dreaming about a citizenry. A Jewish intelligentsia actu-

1 On the history of Russian Jews, see Dubnow, S.: *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, trans. I. Friedlaender, with a bibliographical essay, new introduction and outline of the history of Russian and Soviet Jewry, 1912–74, by L. Shapiro, 1975, 2 volumes. The book is a photographic edition of Dubnow’s work, originally published by the Jewish Publication Society in 1916 and 1920, 1st and 2nd volume. See also Dubnow, S. M.: *History of the Jews*, trans. Moshe Spiegel, 1967; Greenberg, L.: *The Jews in Russia. The Struggle for Emancipation*, Vol. I: 1772–1880, 1944; Vol. II: 1881–1917, 1951, 2nd edition, 2 volumes in one, with a new foreword by A. Levin, 1976; Levitats, I.: *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1772–1844*, 1943, reprinted by Octagon Press, 1970; Levitats, I.: *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1844–1917*, 1981; Kandel, F.: *Ocherki vremion i sobytii iz istorii rossiiskikh evreev*, Part 2: 1772–1882 gody, 1990; Part 3: 1882–1920 gody, 1944.

ally thinking about the position of Jews in Russia took two generations to emerge, and when it did, it found itself faced with a doubly difficult situation: they represented a "foreign body" in a society which was itself sick and yearned for reforms.

Advocates of the *Haskala*, the "Jewish enlightenment," the so-called *Maskilim*, must have numbered no more than a few hundred in Russia. They were seeking for the conditions which might enable Jews to live modern lives, fought against the ghetto spirit, yet it never occurred to them to abandon their faith. Their slogan was, "Out of the ghetto!" But the walls of the ghetto were heavily fortified from inside by the orthodoxy of Judaism, the self-imposed seclusion of religion and by fear, and from outside by conservatism and anti-Judaism.

The subject-matter of Russian-Jewish literature is very easy to describe since all its representatives were in fact dealing with the forms of existence of Jewry and anti-Semitism, the living conditions and special problems of Jews. This subject was historically controversial, transitional and constantly changing; that is the reason why these works are necessarily tendentious and ideologically loaded, the load lighter or heavier, something that is also highly characteristic of the literature of the "host nation," Russian literature, from its very beginning.

Periodization of Russian-Jewish literature

Three stages are being distinguished by historical sociology in the assimilation process of the Jewry: integration, acculturation and assimilation. The entire body of Russian-Jewish literature belongs to the dually bound acculturation stage, and its evolution is divided into four periods by both Lvov-Rogachevsky and Shimon Markish, although not exactly in the same way. The aforementioned dates the beginning to 1825 (Early Enlightenment) rather than to 1860, and the dates separating his periods are 1856, 1870 (end of the Great Reforms, destruction of assimilationist ideals), 1890 (national rebirth) and 1914 (end of fourth period, social movements to oppose the national movements).² According to Markish, on the other hand, the beginnings can be put to around 1856, and following 1920, a new period began.

² Lvov-Rogachevsky, op. cit.

My book, too, discusses the history of Russian-Jewish literature in four periods, lasting about twenty years each, periods which, however, will be characterized through peculiar works by specific writers and distinct personalities. In order to provide better orientation, the periods can be marked, if with some reservations, by the separating dates 1860–1882, 1882–1897, 1897–1917 and 1917–1940. Of these dates, the dividing line of 1882, created by the great pogroms, stands out with extreme sharpness. Such sharpness, in fact, is rarely observable in literary history. I will discuss this in sufficient detail later on. Russian-Jewish literature is a product of the belated influence of the Haskala, literature being even more belated than the movement itself, which began to spread first in a very narrow circle. Its beginning coincides with the enthronement of Alexander II (1855), who pursued far more liberal policies than his predecessor, Nicholas I, in all areas of life. (What the lot of the Jews was like under Nicholas I will be discussed while investigating the works themselves, it being a subject which the Russian-Jewish writers wanted the world to know about.)³ Easing the life of the Jews was part of the overall reforms of Alexander II started around 1860, reforms including, among other things, permission to launch the first Russian-Jewish journal. It was in this progressive period in the history of Russia that a Russian-speaking Jewish reading public emerged, largely by the 1860s.

Russian-Jewish periodicals (1860–1934)

Russian-Jewish periodicals, the existence of which always depended on the goodwill of the censors of the day and on the pliability of local authorities which happened to be in power, played a major role in the evolution of Russian-Jewish literature.⁴ The first comer was Osip Rabinovich's weekly *Rassvet* (Dawn).

³ Merely reading the laws regulating the life of Jews down to the smallest detail, and changing so often as to be almost impossible to follow, is almost a complete historical study itself. The laws relating to Jews, going back 220 years, had been collected by Vitaly Levanda, the brother of the writer, Lev Levanda, and published in 1874. See Levanda, P. O.: *Polnyi khronologicheskii sbornik zakonov i polozhenii, kasaiushchiks'a evreev, ot Ulozheniia tsar'a Alekseia Mikhailovicha do nastoiashchego vremeni, 1649–1873*, 1874.

⁴ On the launching of the first Russian-Jewish periodicals, see Klier, John: "The Jewish Question in the Reform Era Russian Press, 1855–1865," *The Russian Review* XXXIX/3 (1980), pp. 301–320.

Progress in Russia, by the natural course of events, will lead to culture and progress among our masses and consequently also to their moral and civil well-being. It is an incontestable truth based on history, a reality recognized by all eminent publicists, that in all states the most energetic protector of our nation has always been the spirit of progress; light has been its strongest guaranty, civilisation its best safeguard. Our Emperor, who has tackled the problems of the oppressed class, has also given consideration to the state of our brethren.⁵

Joseph Tarnopol wrote, announcing the launching of *Rassvet* which, however, survived for a year only in Odessa before being banned by the authorities. Its successor, started under a different title, *Zion*, and with a new editor, met the same fate, as did the next journal, *Den'* (1869–71) a little later. Looking a little ahead, it is worth while to review the most important Russian-language periodicals. Because of the anti-Jewish mood prevailing in Odessa, the cultural centre of Russian Jews shifted to St. Petersburg from 1871 on. That was when the series of *Evreiskaia Biblioteka* was launched, publishing the best of Russian-Jewish literature in 10 volumes until 1903. No other Russian-Jewish periodical functioned in the seventies. *Rassvet II* was started in 1879 (it survived until 1883), which was followed in 1881 by the high-standard “heavy” monthly journal *Voskhod* (Sunrise), operating a parallel daily as well, appearing uninterrupted for 25 years, until 1906, edited by Adolf Landau.⁶

The writers of the first Russian-Jewish literary journals were entering into the context of Russian literary tradition, but were doing so while keeping their Jewish identity; for them, writing in Russian, along with the objectives of assimilation, also implied the promise of absorption into the literature of a great nation. True, first and foremost they wanted to help Jews to find their place as citizens of Tsarist Russia, but, differently from the French model, they wanted to be just one of the nationalities and religious groups making up this multinational state. (They were hoping to achieve the status of “Russians of the Mosaic faith.”) Russian-Jewish literature was also addressed to Russians and meant for Russians as well, as is proved by the footnotes and explanations of terms found in the works. Russian-Jewish writers were counting on the help and support of the Russian liberal intelligentsia, of writers and even politicians. They would be bitterly disappointed in their expectations, as was evi-

⁵ Quoted from Orbach, A.: *New Voices of Russian Jewry. A Study of the Russian-Jewish Press of Odessa in the Era of the Great Reforms 1860–1871*, 1980.

⁶ On Adolf Landau, see Kelner, V. E.: “Adolf Landau—izdatel', redaktor, publitsist. (Iz istorii russko-evreiskogo izdatel'skogo dela vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka),” in Kelner, V. E.: *Ocherki po istorii russko-evreiskogo dela vo vtoroi polovine XIX—nachale XX veka*, 2003.

denced by the so-called *Illustratsia* Affair of 1858 (in the paper *Illustratsia*, two journalists expressed approval for the order banning Jews from Moscow), giving rise to a polemic in which some wide-spread prejudices were exposed.⁷ Russian liberals did not react to the problems of Russian Jews, including the pogroms, as they were expected to by the Russian Jews.

Table 1.

Periodicals and series publishing major Russian-Jewish works (poetry and fiction).⁸

Title	Duration of publishing	Place of issue	Frequency	Editor(s)
<i>Rassvet I</i>	(1860–1861)	Odessa	weekly	Joakim Tarnopol, Osip Rabinovich
<i>Zion</i>	(1862–1863)	Odessa	weekly	Leon Pinsker, Emmanuil Soloveichik
<i>Den'</i>	(1869–1871)	Odessa	weekly	Samuil Ornstein, Iliia Orh-sanskii, Mikhail Morgulis
<i>Evreiskaia Biblioteka</i>	(1871–1903)	St. Petersburg	a total of 10 volumes	Adolf Landau
<i>Russkii Evrei</i>	(1879–1944)		numbered volumes	Lazar Benua, Grigory Bogrov, Lev Kantor
<i>Rassvet II</i>	(1879–1883)	St. Petersburg	weekly	Aleksandr Tsederbaum, Aron Goldenblum, Mark Varshavsky, Nikolai Milenkin (= Minsky)
<i>Voskhod</i>	(1881–1906)	St. Petersburg	"heavy" monthly	Adolf Landau, Samuil Gruzenberg
<i>Nedelnaia Khronika Voskhoda</i>	(1882–1897)		weekly annex of the aforementioned, later by the name <i>Khronika Voskhoda</i> (–1906), <i>Knizhki Voskhoda</i> (1908–)	Adolf Landau
<i>Evreiskii Mir</i>	(1909)	St. Petersburg	monthly (1910–1911), weekly in 1910 for several months as <i>Evreiskoie Obozreniie</i>	Andrei Sobol
<i>Evreiskii Mir</i>	(1918–)		volumes	Andrei Sobol
<i>Rassvet III</i>	(1907–1915, 1917–1918)		weekly	A. Idelson
<i>Rassvet IV</i>	(1922–34)	Berlin, then Paris	monthly	Vladimir Jabotinsky

⁷ On this, see Klier, J. D.: "The *Illustratsia* Affair of 1858: Polemics on the Jewish Question in the Russian Press," *Nationalities Papers* V/2 (1977), pp. 117–35.

⁸ A source for a more detailed list: *Evreiskaia entsiklopedia*, t. XII, St. Petersburg, [n.d.—1906–1913], columns 439–40. See also Tsinberg, S. L.: *Istoriia evreiskoi pechati v Rossii*, Petrograd, 1915. On periodicals published in exile, see *Half a Century of Russian Serials 1917–1968. Cumulative Index of Serials Published Outside the USSR*, 4 volumes, comp. Michael Schatoff, 1972, 2nd revised edition.

The beginning of Russian-Jewish literature (before 1860)

If the liberal period of the Rule of Alexander II had never taken place, the Haskala would have been unlikely to be able to create a Russian language literature on its own, only scattered traces of which were emerging at the beginning of the 19th century. The first work to appear in print was a piece by Yehuda Leib Nevakhovich, *Lament of an Israelite Girl* (St. Petersburg, 1803). The title covers three exercises in sentimental rhetoric in which the author pleads that Jews are human too, they also suffer from humiliation and poverty, and Russians only have to know them better to welcome them as their compatriots. Incidentally, the author dedicated his work to the Minister of the Interior. The three tirades have a twofold importance: first, they sum up the fundamental theses of the Haskala in Russian for the first time, and second, the readers they are addressed to are not Jews but mainly Russians.

The writer Leon (Leib) Mandelstam (1819–89) was the first Jewish undergraduate to study at a Russian university. He published his volume *Poems* in 1840. Mandelstam's poetry does not show a brilliant talent, yet he became an important figure in Russian Jewish culture, because he spent ten years in the employ of the ministry of popular education as an expert on Jewish affairs, and the edition of a Russian-Hebrew and Hebrew-Russian dictionary is also associated with his name. He translated the Torah and the Psalms into Russian, and he published numerous essays in journals, including foreign ones. Osip Rabinovich, who is widely regarded as the founder of Russian-Jewish literature, wrote about him in a letter: "A few drops of truth dissolved in an endless torrent of empty words. There is some thought and truth to it, but it all gets lost in the chaos of words. And what a style! If I tried to read it aloud, my tongue might break."

*Thoughts of an Israelite, in 2 Parts, a Work of the Jew Abraham Solomonov*⁹ is interesting from the aspect of cultural history. Born in Minsk, Solomonov (1778–?) was a Maskil, an advocate of the Haskala, and in line with his creed, he translated from Hebrew into Russian and Polish. In his treatise he turns to the Jews, pointing out, in the spirit of the Haskala, that Jews are not prohibited either by the Talmud or by any post-Talmudic Jewish book to make the language and culture of the host country their own. The basic tenet of the

⁹ *Mysli Izrail'tianina. V. 2-kh chast'akh*, Sochinenie Evreia Abrama Solomonova, 1846.

Haskala for Russian Jews was formulated in a poem written in Hebrew by Yehuda Leib Gordon in 1861 in this way: "Be a Jew in your own house, and a man when you step out of your house." Osip Rabinovich proposes the same in Russian: "While adhering to the allegiance of our forefathers and remaining faithful to our religious convictions, we should be Jews only in the synagogue. Outside the walls of the synagogue we are sons of our country, citizens of the states in whose midst we live."¹⁰

The core of the first period of Russian-Jewish literature is the utopia of assimilation, the utopia, in the words of Rabinovich, of "fusion with the true-born population." The three major figures of this period were Osip Rabinovich, Lev Levanda and Grigory Bogrov.

Osip Rabinovich (1817–1869)

Osip Rabinovich is one of the first important figures and launchers of Russian-Jewish literature. He was the first representative of the second generation of Maskilim, enlightened Jews who no longer drew on the German Haskala and "fed on" German culture, but on Russian literature. We have seen that the launching of the first Jewish magazine to appear with a monthly regularity, *Rassvet*, was connected with his name, and this was also the actual beginning of Russian-Jewish literature. The Yiddish author Mendele Moykher Sforim remembers this hopeful period in his introduction to *Fishke the Lame*¹¹ in the following way: "We started our work in Jewish literature when a new spring seemed to set in in the life of the Jewish people. From the sixties of our century, a new life began for Jews: a cheerful life promising good hopes. [...] That beautiful springtime is gone." The spiritual road covered by Osip Rabinovich is also characteristic of the intellectual development of 19th century Russian Jewry. At the start of his career he was fully convinced that Russification represented the future and the only possible way for Russian Jews. As time went by, he became increasingly doubtful if there was any sense in Russian patriotism and amalgamation with the host nation at all. In the beginning he was a

¹⁰ *Rassvet* 8 (1860).

¹¹ Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Fishke der Krumer*, Warsaw, 1928. In English: S. Y. Abramovitsh (Mendele Moykher Sforim): *Tales of Mendele the Book Peddler, Fishke the Lame and Benjamin the Third* [Yiddish Classics Series], eds. Dan Miron and Ken Frieden, trans. T. Gorelick and Hillel Halkin, 1996.

sworn enemy of Yiddish, while later on he started to collect Yiddish folklore material, songs and proverbs, and in fact he was the first to attempt to render the flavour of Yiddish structures and intonation in Russian. His attitude of protecting the Jewish community from its external enemies while incessantly castigating it from inside served as a model for the next generations of the Jewish intelligentsia. He published a sharp response to anti-Semitic attacks (*At the Light of Obsolete Views*)¹² in the same year, 1858, as a scathingly ironic piece mocking the backward, stifling world of the *shtetl* (*On Moshkas and Yoshkas*).¹³ Rabinovich became the target of sharp attacks from Jewish quarters. His argument that without self-criticism, their criticism of others had no credibility did not impress his opponents, who thought that by “exposing” internal conflicts, he was playing into the hands of the enemy.

Two of his literary works won extraordinary notice: *Refractory Soldier*,¹⁴ which appeared in 1859, and *The Inherited Candlestick*,¹⁵ published in 1860. The third and most brilliant of his stories went almost unnoticed in its own time. It appeared in the form of a small booklet in Odessa in 1865, and bore the title *A Story about How Reb Khayim-Shulim Feigis from Kishinev Journeyed to Odessa, and What Happened to Him*. Regarding Rabinovich’s literary models—and from the viewpoint of comparison—the names mentioned in his articles on West European literature offer something to rely on. He was very widely read and well-informed: “We will refer only to famous people like Salvador, Much, Rappoport, Jost, Zunz, Geiger, Frankl, Luzzato, Riesser, Gretz, Dukes, Jules Janin, Auerbach, Kompert, Kayserling.”¹⁶

Lvov-Rogachevsky, who was referred to in the introduction of this book, considers Rabinovich, along with his contemporaries Lev Levanda and Grigory Bogrov, mediocre talents but original writers with a voice of their own. There is undeniably a measure of truth to his observation that these authors kept for ever interrupting what they were saying, inserting stuff already published in their articles. “They did not create a single ‘charming’ story. Absent from their works were the joyful play and bright smile of art.”¹⁷ Khayim-

12 “Ustarelyie vzgliady pri dnevnom svete,” *Russkii Invalid* 3 (1858), reprinted: O. Rabinovich, *Izbrannoe*, Jerusalem, 1985.

13 “O Moshkakh i Ioskakh,” *Odesskii Vestnik* 10 (1858), reprinted: *ibid*.

14 “Shtrafnoi,” *Russkii Vestnik* 6 (1859), reprinted: *ibid*.

15 “Nasledstvennii podsvechnik,” *Rassvet* 1–8 (1860), reprinted: *ibid*.

16 *Rassvet* 48 (21 April 1861). Quoted by Markish, Sh.: “Osip Rabinovich,” *Vestnik Evreiskogo Universiteta v Moskve* 1/5 (1994), p. 137. The name of Bertold Auerbach was well known among Jewish readers from the idylls of *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten* (1843–1853).

17 Lvov-Rogachevsky, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

Shulim's story seems to have escaped Lvov-Rogachevsky's attention just as it did that of subsequent scholars. A. Levin, the American translator of Lvov-Rogachevsky's monograph and the author of its introduction, confirms even in 1972: "Russian-Jewish literature generally lacked the humor that marked Yiddish literature... (the author's) art was lacking individuality."¹⁸

Rabinovich's first short novel, *Refractory Soldier* (1859) is centered upon a Jewish man's life story, the events of which were determined by the anti-Jewish, discriminative laws of Nicholas I. Jews were obliged to muster ten times as many soldiers as their population ratio. When a Jew without a passport (a *poimanik*¹⁹) was caught outside the district designated as his place of residence or outside the province, he was immediately enlisted in the army of the Tsar for the usual term of 25 years. Head-hunters or "catchers" (*lovets*, variously called also *lovchik* or *khaper*²⁰) specializing in this trade were roaming the countryside, seeking out suitable "replacements" because the Jew called up or the community delegating him could send a substitute. The *poimaniks* were sold by the Tsar's gendarmes as "replacements," thus developing a full-blown trade in human beings. A passport was valid for two years only, and if a man was late to renew its validity, or missed renewing it because, as was often the case, he lacked the money it cost, he instantly became eligible for military service. In want of Jews without documents, the gendarmes would easily "find" Jews without passports: they caught a Jew, confiscated his documents, and destroyed them. Since there was no bottom age limit for military service, children were often enlisted. Moreover, the forced conscription of children became a deliberate policy: young boys of 10 to 14 were being marched on foot to distant areas, and those who survived the march would be baptized by force. The so-called Kantonists,²¹ the survivors who received a six-

18 Ibid., pp. 52, 53.

19 *Poimannik* (detained)—a Jew arrested for not having a valid passport. A *poimanik* was obliged to start military service immediately. A *poimanik* was a good source of money because he could be exchanged for somebody else who was required to start military service, such as a father of a big family or a young educated man.

20 The *lovets* (catcher) was usually a gendarme who sold this man, sometimes not to somebody called up for military service but to his *kahal* (the Jewish community). The *kahal's* responsibility was to collect a certain number of soldiers according to the size of the *kahal*. A *kahal* itself sent out catchers sometimes when it wanted to save a father of a big family. The *kahal* was obliged to maintain families without breadwinners for many years, and it was cheaper to find a poor, lonely Jew or someone from another community and send him to the army.

21 "Kantonist"—there was no minimum age for military service under Nicholas I. Children were sent to military service from the *kahal* for the same reason as *poimaniks*. Jews tried to save children in an original way, by having them marry very early. On the other hand, the Tsarist

year “preparatory training” before actually starting their military service, were released from the army after 25 more years. According to the figures of Lvov-Rogachevsky, between 1826 and 1857, some seven million children suffered the fate of the Kantonists (obviously a total figure in which he included not only Jewish children whose number must have been around 50,000²²).

The narrative technique of *Refractory Soldier* follows the patters of contemporary Russian literature.²³ The narrator tells only a couple of words about himself for the sake of authenticity, by way of introduction (letting us know how he got into town, and what he did there), before the central character enters the scene, first only as an enigmatic figure seen in distant images, then the narrator makes his acquaintance. The story emerges from two conversations they had, separated by nine years, in the shape of a retrospective confession. There is no distancing in any subtle way between the writer and his plot, or more exactly, between the author and the narrator. The narrator is a naive youth “with a noble soul” given to romantic ideals, all in all a rather stereotypical figure.

Rabinovich does not incite rebellion; he only tells a moving story, the life of an elder of a religious community, joining the army himself because there was no one in his community whom he could designate for conscription. Starting with that, his family suffers a series of misfortunes and tragedies: his wife dies of sorrow, his elder daughter loses her mind, and the younger becomes a prostitute and later the murderer of her child. At the closing part, the hero says farewell to his life in a rather sentimental manner, and dies. His last words are those of resignation and acquiescence: “Do not complain. Everything has a purpose, and you cannot influence it. Fulfill honestly what the earthly laws dictate.”²⁴ The laconic account of the funeral escapes the traps of

government also forced the conscription of young men: ten-year old Jewish boys were taken from their families and led on foot to Siberia or other remote territories. Those who survived (less than a third) were baptized, trained and drilled in a 6-year pre-military regime, after which they served in the army for 25 years. Hardly any of them could remember where he had come from. There were 50,000 Jewish child Kantonists between 1826 and 1857. However, there were exceptions: there was even a Russian-Jewish writer (V. Nikitin) with a changed name given to him in Baptism, who became a chinovnik of higher rank after his military service, and started writing about his life only when he retired.

²² Ibid., p. 107. For the genuine figure: *Kratkaia evreiskaia entsiklopedia*, t. 4, Jerusalem, 1988, column 78. On the Kantonists, see Flisfish, E.: *Kantonisty*, 1983.

²³ The age-old stories-within-a-story type technique may be traced back to Boccaccio and, among Rabinovich's contemporaries, Ivan Turgenev had a predilection for it. The pieces of *The Hunter's Sketches* (1852) may have served as a model for Rabinovich at the start of his career.

²⁴ Reprinted edition cited, p. 74.

sentimentality, and successfully counterpoints the dying man's last words in which the "message" is formulated all too directly, thus diminishing the genuine effect of the narrative. The plot of the story, especially the closing part, is obviously built on the Biblical story of Job, but Rabinovich's Job never even objects, much less revolts, shouts or even grumbles. The text itself makes no allusion, either by quote or reference, to the story of Job, but the parallel is made evident by the note on which it ends.

There are several signs indicating that Rabinovich meant his story not only for Jewish readers but also for Russians. Words said in Hebrew or Yiddish are highlighted by italicization (e.g. *tzaddik* or *kerbel* as ruble). He also italicizes typical Hebrew or Jewish turns of speech or metaphors, originally phrases such as "we went *licking*" (meaning "to have few drinks") or "the passport disappeared *body and soul*," (that is, "fully").²⁵ He applies the same procedure in several of his works.

The Inherited Candlestick (1860) no longer has the same sentimental rhetoric, even though the theme, the bitter lot of a Jewish family, is very similar. The figures are characterized by genre pictures embedded in dialogues with a humorous flavor, by indirect means, and the chronological antecedents, the biographic past, is shown by Rabinovich within the actual scenes only. Some of the shifts are naively clumsy from the viewpoint of prose technique: "And now we have in front of our eyes the man and husband, now old people"; "Many years before the start of our narrative..."; "Let us now neglect a considerable period by keeping silent about it..."²⁶

In the central chapters (I-IV), using the "speaking in a circle" method often employed also by Russian literature of this time, each member of the company is given the word one after the other, and tells a story about the same topic.²⁷ What they all tell about is how they were mistreated by the Russian Tsarist gendarmerie. Two of the stories are built upon an anecdote, including the anecdote's punch line, a new element in Russian-Jewish literature, which, however, would be long-lasting. The most successful story, which might just as well bear the title "The Jew in Moscow," portrays the labyrinthine ways of bureaucracy, with a masterful delivery of the punch lines in the humorous part (when the Jew of the story lands in prison basically because he went to see Hamlet in the theatre). The widely traveled Jew with a "hunger for culture"

25 Ibid., pp. 53, 66.

26 Ibid., pp. 85, 86, 164.

27 Chekhov's famous "Little Trilogy" of stories, *The Man in a Case*, *Gooseberries* and *About Love*, have a similar framework structure.

quotes amply from Hamlet in his own manner: "Hamlet is yelling at his mother, he says 'Hey, you never even wore out a pair of shoes before I, with my sabre,' David Zakhariich continued and, leaping to the middle of the room, began to imitate Hamlet, throwing his arms about. Or, 'Go to a monastery, Ophelia, go to the monks, off with you to the monks, Ophelia!'"²⁸

In the work, even though portraying inhuman fates, *irony* appears for the first time, and largely owing to the dialogues. One element of appealing to the emotions is the insertion of children's speech, and the other is the employment of poetic means: "It was but a few minutes that the prayer of the three frail beings lasted, one of whom was approaching the grave, the other yearning for life and the third barely making her appearance in the world of God, like grass appearing over the ground at the first breeze of spring."²⁹ The poetic image embraces the female figures of three generations, finishing it off with a natural simile. The lonely woman having lost her husband and son, and the young woman faithful to her mother in law wandering on the road evokes a Biblical scene at the end, the characters of Ruth and Naomi. The message of the last page is the same as that of the *Refractory Soldier*: "No curse, no revolt, no outrage"³⁰ should disturb the images of the memory, the elder woman teaches the younger one, looking at the candlestick.

In the text, written in Russian, Rabinovich again marks which language his characters speak. Written next to italicized Russian words and proverbs one finds the words, "he said in Russian"; Ukrainian words are not specially marked (which is something made possible by old Russian spelling), while Hebrew or Yiddish words, also in italics, are either marked with a note or not. When referring to the dead, the customary Jewish sentence is literally translated into a form understood also by Russians ("let the earth not press his bones hard")³¹ even though there was a popularly used turn of speech for the same thing ("be the soil easy on him"). Similarly, the traditional Aramaic marriage contract can be read in Russian,³² just as the custom of glass-breaking is explained by those present, flavored with explanations taken

28 Reprinted edition cited, p. 142. It is interesting to note that he talks about the same production. Mochalov's performance, which is mentioned in Turgenev's story, on the last pages of *Piotr Petrovich Karatayev* in the cycle *The Hunter's Sketchbook* (1852). It seems that besides a kinship in form, there are also associations regarding the contents: Rabinovich's anecdote may be seen as paraphrasing Turgenev's bitter and sad ending of his story.

29 Ibid., p. 207.

30 Ibid., p. 220.

31 Ibid., p. 167

32 Ibid., p. 130.

from Jewish history. Footnotes are also frequent in the case of Jewish food names, religious-ritual objects and customs. There are even some examples for the simultaneous use of the same word's Hebrew and Russian plural (*Hasidimov*).

Rabinovich's explanations of words and customs are not only meant to spread knowledge, that is, it was not his sole intention to make some Jewish customs which were sharply different from those of the environment better understood and brought closer to the Russian reader. In the 1830s and 1840s, Russian writers turned their attention very deliberately toward folklore. Describing and preserving the products of Russian popular culture was one of the manifestations of the search of late Romantic literature for a living national culture, which went together with the demand for a scientific collection and recording of the folklore material unearthed by Romanticism. Writers themselves were the collectors of folklore; Gogol collected Ukrainian popular beliefs, Pushkin made use of themes and formal elements of Russian folklore which he adapted aesthetically to literature, while Dal' carried out a collecting work of ethnographic value. With Rabinovich, the notes and explanations mentioned above also represent an effort at the recognition and saving of national values (starting rather late when compared to Russian literature, but immediate and parallel with the starting phase where Russian-Jewish literature was concerned, which began only in the 1860s). Let me mention here what a pity it is that the material of Rabinovich's prose could never land on the desk of Sándor Scheiber, the eminent Hungarian Judaic scholar, literary historian and folklorist, who would certainly have gladly included, for example, Rabinovich's description of the glass-breaking ritual at wedding ceremonies among his other similar examples in his Jewish folklore collection.³³ There is, however, a circumstance which makes Rabinovich's folklore material more authentic than that of the Russian authors mentioned. In their search for Russian national and popular values, Russian writers all "descended" to the people, trying to bridge a gulf when using or portraying popular genres, customs and language. According to Apollon Grigoriev, the way the so-called "people" are represented by Turgenev and Grigorovich, picking out moments in its life that may be shown as lofty and admirable, is nothing short of "artificial and false."³⁴ For the Jewish writer Rabinovich, however, the customs still repre-

33 Scheiber, Sándor: "A zsidó folklór Ujvári Péter írásaiban," *Folklór és tárgytörténet* III, Budapest, 1984, pp. 268, 292; as well as Scheiber's note 32. In English, see Scheiber, S.: *Essays on Jewish Folklore and Comparative Literature*, 1985.

34 *Russkaia povest' XIX veka*, p. 361.

sented living actions recurring in daily life. In his case there was still no gulf between the various classes of Jewry, and neither was there any distance in time from the customs and rituals of his people. That would develop only by the early 20th century, as would be witnessed by the dramas of Semyon Yushkevich.

"History of the journey of Khayim-Shulim"

A Story about How Reb Khayim-Shulim Feigis from Kishinev Journeyed to Odessa, and What Happened to Him (1865) is Rabinovich's last work of fiction. It is the forerunner or archetype of such great works as Sholom Aleichem's *Tevye the Milkman*, Mendeleyev's *Fishke the Lamb*, Isaac Babel's *Shabbos Nakhamu*, *The Eventful Life of Lasik Rotschwanz* by Ilya Ehrenburg, or even the novels of Ilf and Petrov. In fact, this novel marks the beginning of what is called "Odessa literature."

The basis of the novella, divided into eight parts, is an anecdote. The plot itself is built upon a very fundamental anecdote: Khayim-Shulim, the poor watchmaker, wins a considerable sum at the Warsaw lottery, and travels to Odessa to collect on his winning ticket. At the end of the vicissitudinous journey accomplished on loans, there awaits Odessa, the "city of sin," where Khayim-Shulim gambles the fabulous fortune away with his newly found "friends," and returns home as poor as he ever was.

The organizing element of the fable is *running*, and there are two types of it. One is the "linear" run from one of the end-points indicated in the title to the other, and back. It is important to note that the run back is not a sorrowful escape, nor a defeat. Rabinovich created a protagonist who is small-minded, ordinary, even vulgar at times, and there is nothing lofty about him, not even anything special, but he is always on the run, or rather running *for* something, and he only runs when he perceives a goal before him. When running to Odessa, he sees the money in his mind's eye. He is leaving Kishinev for the first time in his life; he is both a bit afraid, and brags a little as a would-be rich man. Being rich for him is the same thing as filling his stomach. He takes orders from his wife covering everything from household stuff to trashy trinkets and jewels, and swaggers before the neighbors just for fun, to provoke their envy. Khayim-Shulim is the rogue and the survival artist but, once out of his little "ghetto," also the archetypal loser too afraid to raise his voice even when he accidentally notices that he is being swindled. In Odessa, Khayim-Shulim is a man lost, a country bumpkin. His money is gone, he cannot even

pay his hotel bill, and no longer writes letters home. After the running, a static stage of paralysis ensues; time stands still, or vanishes altogether, the scope of movement is narrowed down. Khayim-Shulim is on the verge of being swallowed up by the big city for good, when he glances through a window and sees an average Jewish family. "Reb Khayim-Shulim stood there for a long time, as if pinned down there by a magic force...—God, oh, my God, I have a wife and children somewhere too!—he cried out finally, and began to run as fast as he could."³⁵ Now Khayim-Shulim is running to his family; he is on the way home, and that is what makes him move again, and leads him back to life.

Finding his way home has a variety of meanings. First of all it shows a motif which completely contradicts the stereotype of the "eternal" or "wandering" Jew unable to find peace and rest anywhere. This philosophical medieval legend became associated with the "homeless," "cosmopolitan" or "rootless" mentality of Jews by the modern anti-Semitism of the 19th century, so the return, the very existence of "home" is important as the opposite of that stereotype. But Jews themselves are often inclined to an interpretation of the Diaspora according to which the roles and attitudes of Jews are symbolically determined by their eternal condition of being outsiders, eternal wanderers and outcasts. George Steiner's ideas on this are cited by Cynthia Ozick.³⁶ In reality the smallest communal element of the preservation of Jewish tradition is the family, which is also one of the highest values according to Judaism, the laws of religion, a value in which the power of tradition, as a means of survival, looms up in the background beneath the home.

Finding the way back home is also an alternative to material wealth in Rabinovich's work. Khayim-Shulim does think about home every now and then while he is rich, but it does not even occur to him to go home. The moral of the paradigmatic tale could be something like "the genuine value is not money but the family," or "wealth is to be found not in external life but in the internal one." This theme, incidentally, already made its appearance in Rabinovich's first novel, *Morits Sefardi*. Landing in Odessa, Moris got rich by the help of a little trick, but he could not find happiness. *Morits Sefardi* is, at the same time, a Balzacian career story, with a protagonist whose eternal unhappiness for a one-time minor betrayal, and his destiny also show that external

35 Reprinted edition cited, p. 297.

36 "Exile is a metaphor for the essential Jew and himself is a metaphor for Exile. 'I am a wanderer, a Luftmensch... but I have made of my harrying [...] Homelessness is the virtue of being disarmed... By declaring himself marginal man, wanderer and guest, the visitor pronounced himself 'unto the elements... free'." Ozick, op. cit., p. 264.

success, a brilliant career, may empty a man inside, spiritually. In Khayim-Shulim, Rabinovich does not spell out any kind of moral, and his novella is rounded off nicely, ending with a point. Still, the journey may be seen as an eternal metaphor. Of the eight chapters, the two central ones are devoted to travelling, to the dividing line between home and strange places. Only those can really return home who have left. You have to travel to be able to see your home as nicer; you have to be more distant to be able to value the ordinary days always around you.

Khayim-Shulim leaves Kishinev, his only solid point of reference, for the first time in his life. Rabinovich does not describe the world outlook and thoughts of his hero from outside but allows these thoughts to be heard directly, without translation or quotation marks, via internal monologues.

The "journey" indicated in the title was one of the favorite genres of 18th century sentimentalism. Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* had an enormous influence on all similar novels of the age, even though the peculiar feature of Sterne's work is its satirical approach to the events of the actual journey, and their reappraisal as a parody. Transplanted to Russian soil, the same sentimental genre tradition found expression in the works of Karamzin and Radishchev's novel *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (1789), dominated by a panorama of the sorry state of the Russian homeland. St. Petersburg and Moscow are not only geographically distant from one another; they also represent two bastions, the two capitals of Russia, embodiments of the great Russian East-West ambivalence, city names of allegorical content, the symbols of Asia and Europe in the whole of 19th century Russian literature.

In his revealing panorama, Radishchev travels the whole length from West to East, from Europe to Asia, along with the reader. Kishinev and Odessa, however, are not very distant from each other even within the area of the Pale, thus ironically lessening the dimensions of the "great adventure" in the very title; all the more so as Khayim-Shulim does not even leave the Jewish milieu for a moment, and never has to face a different culture. Many a great antecedent of the journey theme can be listed in world literature. Even episodes of the *Odyssey* are faintly discernible in the background of the history of Khayim-Shulim who, arriving home empty-handed, rescues only his own "wiser" self intact, and has to resort to a ploy to be able to win back his wife. Also closely akin to Rabinovich's work is the world of the picaresque novel, a highly fertile genre running through European literature from the very beginning, from the Renaissance wanderings on, which proved immensely popular in its own sub-cultural variant sold on canvas at markets and fairs, the tradition going back to the Middle Ages.

There is another type of running in the book: a frenzied sort of dashing to and fro. Khayim-Shulim begins to run as soon as he learns about the winning, and from then on the rest reads like the script of a movie burlesque:

"Let's go, Reb Haskel, let's run, run as if we were running for our life!"

At that, everything turned upside down in the room. Reb Khayim-Shulim was leaping from one corner of the room to the next, as if he had gone mad, because he wanted to get dressed as fast as he could, but whatever he touched dropped from his hands. Reb Haskel was jumping about after him, toppling every now and then, and searching, digging for something in every corner; as a matter of fact he had no idea what he was looking for. Chasing them was Menyi-Kroina, also jumping to and fro, gesticulating wildly, and repeating "Here you are," "Here you are," as if she were giving them something, but she gave nothing, while a host of children were scrambling and somersaulting around between their legs.

"Let's run, let's run, Reb Haskel," Reb Khayim-Shulim cried.

"Let's run, run, Reb Khayim-Shulim," Reb Haskel echoed.

"But then you should, Menyi-Kroina, my dear, you know what I mean," Khayim-Shulim went on shouting.

"Oh, yes, you can be sure of that," the woman replied, although she did not have the faintest idea what her husband was talking about, who then took the word over: "Good, that's the right thing to say," he answered, even though now he did not understand either what they were talking about.

[...]

In a moment the entire market knew what was going on, so by the time our travellers broke into a run again, still not knowing where and why, half the market was after them. Like the little snowball which, rolling down the slopes of the Alps, grows into a huge mass, and ends up as a rolling snow-mountain, the running crowd swelled in the same way, with newer and newer people being added, pouring from of the side streets. On the other side, the deputation led by Menyi-Kroina also achieved rapid success, which meant further mobs running in all directions in every street. It all ended in general mayhem, and in less than half an hour, half of Kishinev's Jewish population was running about in the markets, the streets, the cul-de-sacs, back alleys, cross streets, and nobody knew why and where they were running but nobody cared either. [...] And this was a distinguished day in the history of the distinguished town of Kishinev, and at the instructions of the *kahal*,³⁷ the notary of the *kahal* wrote into the *pinchas*:³⁸ "This and that day, in this and that year, Monday, the day of the Big Running."

37 The religious community.

38 Community chronicle (Rabinovich's note).

The same kind of frantic running begins when the *Tzaddik* and his household, a host of in-laws, uncles, cousins, relatives and friends, and whole Hasidic "court" join forces to arrange that the gendarmerie should let Khayim-Shulim pass, though he sets out on his journey without the obligatory documents. Dashing about, making quick arrangement, rumor and panic represent a way of life, the way of life of a small community. It is a typically Jewish community in so far as these people seem to live without any particularly profitable activity, as forerunners or relatives of the *Luftmenschen*. It never even occurs to Khayim-Shulim to work more in order to collect more money. Even the watches given to him to be repaired turn into money sources only when the less urgent pieces go to the pawnshop (another anecdotal element). In Rabinovich's previous works, time was being structured for the protagonists by duty, daily work or service (military service!). The characters of *Khayim-Shulim*, however, are not bound by such constraints; their time is structured while on the road, that is, in space, by the frequency of inns and pubs, and during the day, namely in time, by the frequency of meals. Breakfast, lunch and supper are all described in great detail, another aspect where Rabinovich turns out to be a forerunner of Isaac Babel who showed an exceptional poetic power when it came to describing minute details of a dish. The special flavors of the Odessa language are also represented by Rabinovich by synesthesia, via food similes (see below).

Story and irony

In *Khayim Shulim*, Rabinovich does not at all treat any of the surrounding peoples in any way. The entire story remains inside the Jewish community (not even the gendarme checking the passports is given any text or action to speak of): all is portrayed from inside, and in every respect. The very first sentence is already determined by the narrative attitude of the storyteller who talks in first person singular about "our women," and on whose behalf the story is being set in a Jewish milieu and long-gone past.

Rabinovich does not insert any note on the haircutting custom of married Jewish women,³⁹ although in his previous works he never failed to attach explanations to this sort of thing. However, the word *Tzaddik* is provided with an ironic footnote, and the piety of the *Tzaddik* of Bender or his meaningless

39 Women were shorn of their hair after their wedding. From then on, they wore wigs.

predictions are also described in a satirical manner. The notes provide a glimpse of the character of the narrator, an advocate of enlightenment whose irony, however, is no longer as merciless as it was; he is not educating and sermonizing all the time, so the "story text" may go on uninterrupted. "Back in those days, in the splendid town of Kishinev, the streets were so narrow that...", and here comes an anecdote or a story about two carriages getting tangled up "on one of these streets there stood a house... and in it there lived a happy couple," the stereotypical introductory sentences go, followed usually by an ironical life scene. The action is kept rolling smoothly to the end by the easy irony of the storyteller's manner and turns of speech, which also embed the peculiar Jewish *couleur locale* in a universal framework.⁴⁰ The stories of the caught-up carriages, the lottery winnings going up into thin air, or the gullible peasant (the bewilderment of a man from the countryside in the big city) are obviously migrating stories of the most fundamental kind. Folklore motif research can rarely establish which particular variant serves as the actual source of a writer's treatment of an anecdote type present in several places, just as it is difficult to tell what is more important: the local color or the structure of the story? The simultaneous appearance of the two intertwined elements produces a new phenomenon: the universal (the anecdote type) turns the particular into universal by tying it to a specific environment. The slow-and-easy "yarn-spinning" type structures of the narration and its whole mood lend additional intensity to the story's general reminiscence of folk poetry. The less eventful part of the journey is being abridged by Rabinovich, instead of the folk tales' stereotypical "they walked and walked and walked until," by inserting, "Much as I would like to enlist by name all the places our travelers passed through, it is impossible for me to do so, these place-names being so complicated and difficult that you would not be able to so much as pronounce them if you fail to put walnuts into your cheeks well ahead."⁴¹ The story-teller also makes it clear that he evidently regards the inhabitants of Odessa his

40 Isaac Babel relies on a similar method in his already mentioned story, *Shabbos Nakhamu*. Sándor Scheiber argues that "the author dresses here a widely known migrant motif into Jewish garb. The hero is always a folk figure, a kind of rascal. [...] Babel found his subject ready in folk poetry; he only crammed it full of Jewish names and coated it all with Jewish local colour. We will look for the Jewish spirit in it in vain, but we will definitely find the traces of the author's handiwork." See Sándor Scheiber, op. cit., Vol. II, 1977, p. 465. In English, see Scheiber, S.: *Essays on Jewish Folklore and Comparative Literature*, 1985.

41 Reprinted edition cited, p. 265. It may well be that in this particular case the irony is meant for the Romanian geographic names, since one of the fellow-travellers a few pages earlier came from "a shtetl ending in *zesti*." Ibid., p. 261.

readers. The narrator's partiality is "exposed" when he begins to introduce the reader to the secrets of the peculiar idiom of Odessa, actually characterizing the special flavors of that language by tasty culinary comparisons (the honey-simile is repeated by Mendele Moykher Sforim in his *Fishke the Lame*, end of Chapter 12).

Odessa

For a religious Jew, Odessa was the City of Sin. The assimilated world of Odessa had always been an object of contempt for Hassidim and Orthodox alike. When in Babel's story *The Rebbe* the narrator confesses that he came from Odessa, the rabbi remarks scornfully: "A pious city... The star of our banishment, the involuntary well of our tribulations."⁴²

The special patois of Odessa was an odd development already at that time (Khayim-Shulim actually does not fully understand it), and became odder still as the years went by. In 1857 about a third of the population of Odessa regarded Russian as their mother tongue. Isaac Babel calls this unique language "half Russian, half Ukrainian," a language on which the influence of the Jewish intonation and vocabulary is felt to this day, and he also adds that this language happens to be highly important for him as well as close to his heart.⁴³ This mixed idiom is spoken by the Jewish characters of Babel's *Odessa Stories*. Rabinovich was the first to attempt to render its oddities, and this would be continued by Yushkevich, Hekht and Jabotinsky in the 20th century. Babel adopted the Jewish intonation and characteristic phraseology of the Odessa dialect as an important constituent of his highly original style. Every single element of the "eight or nine" nationalities inhabiting the port city contributed to this language. That number is found in a novel by Jabotinsky, set in Odessa, and written a year before Babel's above quoted letter, which will be discussed in detail in a later chapter of this book. The "eight or nine tribes"⁴⁴ are probably the following: Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish, "Moldovan" (i.e. Romanian), Bulgarian, Polish, French, Greek and Italian. We shall return to our discussion of the peculiarities of the Odessa patois in connection with Jabotinsky's novel. The coexistence of many different cultures (even if not *that* many) was

42 Babel, I.: *Collected Stories*, trans. D. McDuff, 1994. p. 124.

43 Babel, I.: *The Lonely Years: Unpublished Stories and Private Correspondence*, 1964, p. 347. Letter of 26 November, 1934.

44 Jabotinsky, V.: *Piatero*, 1990, p. 24.

characteristic of the entire Pale of Settlement. Rabinovich mixes Ukrainian, Hebrew and Romanian words into his text, thus emphasizing the mixture of cultures.

Multicultural Odessa was where the most peaceful model of Jewish assimilation could be witnessed, since in this colorful environment, Jews, even while hanging on to their culture and religion, did not stand out as sharply as they did from the ethnically homogeneous population of Russian or Ukrainian villages. They did not have to assimilate to a single united set of customs, but to a hybrid lifestyle developed by many peoples in which each was able to retain its individual character and religion. Facts and figures relating to Jews in this particular period of Odessa are known quite precisely from a study published in 1854.⁴⁵ At that time, a sixth of the inhabitants of Odessa were Jews. Indicative of the prestige of the Jewish community were its four synagogues, thirty-five prayer-houses and the number of traders of distinguished rank. (The classification of traders into *gilde*, or ranks, also regulated their rights and freedom to move and operate. Seven Jewish merchants were registered in Odessa as belonging to the first *gilde*, 28 belonged to the second and 444 to the third.) The famous Brody synagogue (1840) in Odessa was the only one in Russia where the cantors singing had a proper musical education, and they sang to the accompaniment of the country's only synagogue organ.⁴⁶

In *Khayim-Shulim*, beside the narrative elements of yarn-spinning and anecdote telling, a very subtle double-play of verification and questioning is also discernible. This was a basic narrative attitude which had become classic with Gogol, an accessory of fantastic stories playing with modalities. There is nothing fantastic about Rabinovich's novella; nevertheless, it may be said that its fairy-tale and anecdotal elements, similarly to fantastic stories, create a kind of distance from the logic of the real world. When Rabinovich writes that "speaking in the language of our realistic newspapers, I would hasten to add that I cannot vouch for the authenticity of that legend," or "The issue whether Reb Khayim-Shulim Feigis and Reb Haskel Shkalikman ran long or not so long is enshrouded in a dense veil of uncertainty; all that has been recorded by

45 Tarnopol, J.: *Notices historiques et caractéristiques sur les Israélites d'Odessa*, 1855. A more modern monograph: Zipperstein, S. J.: *The Jews of Odessa. A Cultural History*, 1985.

46 The first anti-Jewish pogrom in the city, a free port (*porto franco*) for thirty years, was carried out by Greeks. They were burying their patriarch, murdered by Turks, but the Jews kept their shops open, at which rumours were started that the Jews had been involved in the assassination, so the pillage and killing began. The dates of the subsequent pogroms: 1859, 1871, 1881, 1903, 1905.

history are the following facts...,⁴⁷ then he is obviously using the same kind of ironic distancing that we know so well from Gogol's famous story *The Nose* (1833–1835), the first part of which closes with the declaration that nothing certain is known about what followed, after which the narrative goes on. In any case, the reference to Gogol's story is quite apt, as Khayim-Shulim's nose is also accorded a prominent role in the story. When, in the midst of a fight, his wife wants to spit in his face, Khayim-Shulim retreats because he fears "for his splendid nose," and that magnificent nose almost vanishes during the story's ending. This closing episode is interpreted by Shimon Markish as the gesture of the imitated castration rite of carnival night, and the couple's next night, their happiest, as the carnival triumph of fertility.⁴⁸ This is all the more apparent as Khayim Shulim's wealth was as nothing but fleeting glory. It vanished into thin air, the miracle was gone, and life resumed exactly where it had been left off before the trip.

One of the main tools of Rabinovich's verbal humor consists in a deliberate, ironic overdoing of the poetic formulae and means characteristic of "high" literature. The wife of Khayim-Shulim, Menyi Kroyna, cannot get out of her mind what she has heard about the sinful city of Odessa. "Jews eat Swiss cheese there, and Jewish ladies walk about with umbrellas on Saturdays." Umbrellas are gradually given a life of their own by Rabinovich; animating the lifeless object almost anticipates the method of Symbolism: "Umbrellas were gliding to and fro before the eyes of Menyi-Kroyna all the time, whether she was asleep or awake, umbrellas walking up and down on Saturdays in Odessa, accompanied by Jewish ladies"; "...not long ago she saw a prophetic dream in which a whole legion of gaudy umbrellas were displaying themselves shamelessly and indecently around her husband, poking their thin little metal fingers into his pocket." The closing image of the story, also its closing sentence, is nothing short of surrealistic: "Menyi-Kroyna saw an enchanting dream: the tzaddik of Bender himself was personally casting an extremely alluring light blue umbrella into the fire, while handing over the nose of her husband with his right, wrapped into a large pack of Warsaw lottery tickets."⁴⁹ The nose does live a life of its own, but is nevertheless separated from its owner; however, by substituting the object for its owner,

47 Reprinted edition cited, pp. 223, 243–4.

48 Markish, Sh.: "Osip Rabinovich 2," *Vestnik Evreiskogo Universiteta v Moskve* 2/6 (1994), p. 155.

49 The quotes on the "nose" theme are found in the reprint edition, in the order of appearance: pp. 248, 305, 306, 314.

the image of the umbrellas produces a kind of realized synecdoche-type metonymy.

Rabinovich's name shifts based on contacts between object and owner are also very funny. Not only umbrellas are substituted for their owners but also one of Khayim-Shulim's traveling companions is constantly referred to as "Sheepskin Cap" in a synecdoche-type manner.⁵⁰ The transfer of a name via a comparison is another tool of comical effect. "The foursome: like lions; the carriage, like a ship," Reb Haskel promises, at which the horses appear. "One lion was completely blind, and the other had no tail... Khayim-Shulim forgave his friend for the absence of the fourth lion from all his heart." "Belying their descent from the lion race, the horses were hardly in a shape to lift their legs..." "By lunchtime they arrived at a large inn, where they had planned to water the lions."⁵¹ Thus the metamorphosis of the horses had been completed.

Overly elaborate phrases and roundabout descriptions constitute another characteristic part of Rabinovich's verbal humor. Khayim-Shulim, returning home drunk after a day's running around "landed in his home port, with a visible weakness in his lower extremities." His fellow travelers rallied at the news of his lottery win leave no room for him on the carriage, even though he makes useless efforts "to pack and load his own person onto the carriage." Also, Rabinovich's similes are adapted to the thinking of his watch-maker protagonist. When collecting his winnings, Khayim-Shulim's heart hammers like a clock mechanism, and "the Tartar coachman was as dead on time and as silent as a sun-dial."⁵²

"Khayim-Shulim" and Yiddish literature

It would be an interesting topic to examine how and in what manner Rabinovich's life-work is related to contemporary Yiddish literature, but that is a job for specialists of that literature. Still, a certain picture can be formed on the basis of translations, too. The founder of Russian Yiddish literature was Mendeley Moykher Sforim, (1835/36–1917), whose best-known work is the

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 256, 257, 267, 271. See also: "We spent the night in a large three-storey-named village" (ibid., p. 269); "He was known all over Kishinev as the owner of a magnificent sign-board..." (ibid., p. 227).

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 247, 255, 265, 266.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 245, 257, 302.

novel *Fishke the Lane*. Its first 45 page variant was published in 1869, that is, after Rabinovich's picaresque novel. The second, stylistically revised edition had been completed by 1877, but its publication was not authorized. It was in 1888 that the considerably enlarged edition could at long last appear, which would be translated to Hebrew by the author himself in his declining years. *Fishke the Lane* is a loosely structured novel, both funny and sad, diversified by episodes. In the first episode, the narrator, nodding off in the driver's seat of his carriage, crashes with another carriage coming from the opposite direction, carrying a man of a similar fate, another Jewish vendor. The two carriages get tangled so hopelessly that they can only be separated by some peasants passing by. From then on, the two men continue their journey together. It is interesting that this novel, just like Rabinovich's *Khayim-Shulim*, begins with the crash and tangle of two carriages. The famous literary model of the tangled carriages can be found at the beginning of the fifth chapter of Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1842) where, however, it functions not only as a comic introduction, but has a major role in the encounter of the main characters: this is when Chichikov meets the wife and daughter of the Governor. Mendele Moykher Sforim also has a predilection for naming people after some piece of the clothing they wear. For example he calls the gendarme wearing the Tsar's uniform "Red Collar,"⁵³ similarly to Rabinovich's naming his unwanted travelling companion "Sheepskin Cap." Amazingly enough, the book peddler also calls his frail, skeletal horse a "lion" but, unlike Rabinovich, Sforim does not put it into the context of a comparison first. Can there be some kind of ancient, archetypal Jewish image behind this?⁵⁴ Mendele Moykher Sforim also leads his crippled hero to Odessa, who, much like Khayim-Shulim, sees the sinful city as gigantic and bewildering. Nothing lets you know which house is inhabited by a Jew, beggars cannot be instantly recognized, while men are strolling about in the streets openly in the company of women. "No wonder people say the flames of hell are burning forty versts from Odessa already! How right they are!" Fishke sums it all up. "Well, I feel quite comfortable here in hell," Yontl, his more resourceful companion, answers. "Yontl fell a great deal in my eyes.

53 *Tales of Mendele the Book Peddler: Fishke the Lane and Benjamin the Third* [Yiddish Classics Series] by S. Y. Abramovitsh (Mendele Moykher Sforim); edited by Dan Miron and Ken Frieden; introduction by Dan Miron; translations by Ted Gorelick and Hillel Halkin, 1996.

54 Perhaps the similarity that both animals have manes serves as a basis for this particular metaphor.

He was corrupted by this Odessa." *Fishke the Lame* is a rich storehouse of Jewish folklore, but one without notes and explanations.

Regarding form, the father of Yiddish literature follows the same path in his work written in Yiddish as Rabinovich in those written in Russian, especially in the last one. Both authors are striking a basically satirical note, but Moykher Sforim's satire is more lyrical, and he is less distanced in his self-irony than Rabinovich. One of the reasons for this is obviously found in their choice of language. The tale-telling, slowly rolling Yiddish narrative, the anecdotes of which are being carried forward by constant repetitions of the expression "well, as a matter of fact, this is not what I want to talk about," creates an altogether different mood, even in translation, than Rabinovich's more intense, faster-moving Russian imitation of Yiddish (let us remember: his characters also speak Yiddish; he always makes a special note when a repartee written in Russian in the text is being actually *said* in Russian). The pivot of the action of *Fishke the Lame* is also travel. Here, however, being on the road for the beggar is equal to being homeless, to eternal wandering. If the work itself did not appear allegorical enough, the author emphasizes in his introduction that the main source for his entire life-work has been the eternal fate of Jews as wandering beggars. "I always dream about beggars, nothing else. That beggar's pouch, that age-old, large Jewish beggar's pouch, is swinging before my eyes all the time... Oh, that big beggar's pouch always and everywhere!"⁵⁵

Khayim-Shulim is also related to other Yiddish works. Its basic anecdote is in fact identical with the opening story of Sholom Aleichem's *Tevye the Milkman*. The fortune obtained through good luck is all blown, moreover due to the naivety and simple-mindedness of the characters. Both poor Jews are swindled by another Jew, and because of their gullibility, they do not even have the opportunity to enjoy their short-lasting wealth. In a way, Sholom Aleichem's string of anecdotes appears to combine the features of the works of Rabinovich and Mendele. The life of Tevye is nothing but a series of blows, a variant of the fable of Job (Osip Rabinovich's Job story should be remembered here with its series of wandering and exiled generations inheriting the candlestick, and with it, the suffering). However, the predominant element determining the tone of Tevye's stories is that of the indestructible, all-encompassing laughter of bitter self-irony, best exemplified by the oft-quoted, almost proverbial sentence: "You know what, Pan Sholom Aleichem? Let's

⁵⁵ Aleichem, Sh.: *Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories*, trans. and with an introduction by Hillel Halkin, 1996, p. 69.

talk about something more cheerful. Have you heard any news of the cholera in Odessa?"⁵⁶ In two of Sholom Aleichem's works, the plot turns on a winning lottery ticket. In the story *75,000* (1902) the winner is unable to get his ticket back from the rich Jew with whom he deposited it. *The Big Lottery* or, by its other title, *The Jackpot*, is already a play with the moral that wealth does not make you happy: the tailor is pleased to return to his scissors in the end, finally rid of the wealth that dropped upon his neck. The "Odessa-style" texts of Sholom Aleichem are often very reminiscent of those of Rabinovich. The subtitle of the story *Home for Passover* (1903) reads: *A Story about How Melamed Fishl Returned Home for Passover from Balta to Khashchevati, and What Happened to Him on the Way*. The value of Jewish folklore was discovered in the 19th century. The first collection of Jewish jokes was published in 1874.⁵⁷ Volumes of this kind began to proliferate around the turn of the century. Lower-quality, "cheap" joke collections for entertainment were published in New York, London, Vilna and Warsaw; one of them appeared also in a Russian translation. Parallel with that, more serious collections of Hebrew anecdotes with an educational purpose were also produced, complete with footnotes and explanations.⁵⁸ *Khayim-Shulim* is related to the tendencies of both contemporary Russian and Yiddish literature, anticipating the latter in time.

Lev Levanda (1835–1888)

Levanda is a tragic and forgotten figure of Russian literature. His life was typical of talents coming from poor families. Having studied in one of the first state schools in Minsk, he became a schoolmaster at a state school himself. He worked for the governor in the capacity of advisor on Jewish affairs (*uchonyi evrei*) all his life. In contrast to Osip Rabinovich's three-book life-work, he left a legacy of some twenty volumes, never to be published a second time. He was popular in his time but critics considered him a poor writer. He was an unhappy and troubled man, forever worried. He took an active part in

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Dik A. M.: *Witzen und Spitzen oder Anekdoten, Witzen über Witzen*, 1874 (in Yiddish). See also: *Le Witz. Figures de l'esprit et formes de l'art*. Ed. by Christophe Viart. Bruxelles, 2002.

⁵⁸ *Evreiskaia entsiklopedia*, 1906–1913, columns 577–9.

editing all three great Jewish journals published in St. Petersburg (*Voskhod*, *Russkii Evrei*, *Rassvet II*).

Up to the pogroms of 1881–1882, he was a passionate advocate of finding a home in Russia. In 1882 he publicly renounced that dream:

In the last thirty years, our best people did nothing but tried to work for the sake of that great big miraculous union up to the point where they were even ready to part with some of our traditions and everyday customs... But what can we do if those with whom we wish to unite so fervently, full of love, are fighting us off, hitting and kicking out against us with hands holding sticks and iron rods and feet clad in ironed boots."⁵⁹

Levanda turned into an adherent of the pro-Palestine movement. He soon lost his mind, and lived out his last years in a mental asylum.

Turbulent Times, the first large-scale novel in Russian-Jewish literature (1871–1873), is set during the 1863 Polish uprising and in the years preceding it. It portrays the young people of a city (most probably Vilna), whom the Polish nobility would like to take its side during the uprising. (Historically speaking, the support of some two million Jews may have been at stake.) However, Sarin, who is regarded by critics as the author's mouthpiece, sees the future of Jews in joining the Russians. "We must not forget that it was barbaric Russia, not civilized Poland, which first took care of our education and schooling," Sarin argues.⁶⁰ Looked at with the eyes of a modern reader, the alleged shortcomings of the novel (which has never been published again in the 130 years since) are seen in a different light. His critics maintained that Levanda's subject became outdated after the Polish uprising, and that the enthusiastic commitment to Russia which he advocated turned out to be an illusion. The employment of a mouthpiece was regarded as poor novelistic technique, and the explicit representative of the author's views, Sarin, a flawed character.⁶¹ According to Adolf Landau, Levanda portrays the things he has seen sufficiently well, but as soon as he relies on his fantasy, he turns out to be untalented.⁶² Even in his obituary Levanda is described as an unimportant writer whose characters are lifeless; one who changed his conviction all too

59 Levanda, L.: "Privislionskaia khronika," *Russkii Evrei* 1 (1882).

60 Levanda, L.: *Goriachie vremia*, Evreiskaia Biblioteka, v. 1, Spb. 1871, p. 54.

61 Lazarev, M.: "Literaturnaia letopis', zadachi i znacheniie russko-evreiskoi belletristiki. Kriticheskii eskiz," *Voskhod* 5 (1885).

62 Landau, A.: "Raziasneniie i osveshcheniie palestinskogo dvizheniia," *Voskhod* 10 (1884).

often, and his aesthetic tastes were not refined enough.⁶³ Later reviewers were a great deal kinder to Levanda. Although certainly not a writer of genius or a great thinker, Levanda was still a typical representative of Russian-Jewish intelligentsia, an authentic interpreter of its feelings and the problems of his times. "Our culture had no such central figure since the eighties."⁶⁴ Levanda probably resorts to the arguments of daily politics in order to explain his universal fear, and to formulate the problems. For instance, hoping for victory, the Polish rebels, led by the local Catholic priests, are making plans about getting rid of the Jews once they govern the city and the Jews are not needed any more. The scene is not only and not necessarily meant by Levanda to depict the duplicity of the Poles, but casts light on a maneuver all too often repeated through history: the trickery employed in making use, and taking advantage, of the Jews, something that could have been done by the Russians as well, or could have happened during any conflict between groups or parties. "Once liberated, Poland must be a single great Polish family without the slightest involvement of any foreign or outside group," the Poles demand in unison. "The Poles have forced us to become small-time merchants, and now they want us to be imbued with fervent patriotism," the Jews note bitterly.⁶⁵ These sentences are far from being only valid in a specific "Polish" context and a concrete historical situation. They have a far broader meaning and a longer life, since they represent basic manifestations of the problems occurring in connection with Jewish assimilation. For this reason, Sarin should not necessarily be seen as a mere mouthpiece. In Levanda's novel, beside him, different views are also embodied by other psychologically credible characters. "We want to live in peace. If it is a krul,⁶⁶ then let it be a krul. If a tsar, then a tsar. We will obey whom we will be ordered to obey," declares the father of the enthusiastic Polina, who locks her daughter up to keep her from taking part in the uprising, and supports the Poles with money instead. The traditional Jewish community also discusses what position to take, and comes to the conclusion that since they are not especially liked either by the Russians or the Poles, they must try to act so as to satisfy both. "They get into a brawl and fight, then will have a glass of wine together, and forget their anger,

63 Volynsky, A.: "Bytopisatel' russkogo evreistva. Kriticheskii obzor belletristicheskikh proizvedenii L. Levandy," *Voskhod* 7 (1888).

64 Goldberg, B.: "Pamiati L. Levandy. Po povodu 20-letia so dnia ego smerti," *Rassvet* 10 (1908).

65 Levanda, L.: *Goriacheie vremia*, Evreiskaia Biblioteka, v. 2, Spb. 1872, p. 22.

66 "King" in Polish.

but they will never forget their shared hatred for us, because they are, after all, both Gentiles, and we are Jews anyway."⁶⁷

Levanda is often criticized for not progressing purposefully enough towards the outcome of his novel, for halting too long in certain places, only to patch up a conclusion and to "get rid" of his protagonists in a hurry in the end. As a matter of fact, Levanda only tries to apply the rules of the "big novel," providing a panorama of the age and its atmosphere, even using means as "modern" as the shifting of perspectives. The first chapter of the novel contains nothing but letters. We are being dropped, *in medias res*, straight into the correspondence of a young girl educated on Polish culture, an avid reader of the poems of Mickiewicz, with a friend. Through the letters we gain an insight into individual, family and urban problems, the identity shifts of Jews, changes from one generation to the next ("fathers and sons" or "fathers and daughters" in this particular case) and a kind of preview of the protagonists. (Levanda was obviously influenced by Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, a subject of heated debate a decade earlier, in 1862.) The conflict between generations, here too, involves clashing views and positions, and it is the young generation that is "nihilistic" also in this book. Sarin and his friends refuse to take sides in the uprising, and would not serve any of the group interests suggested by the "fathers." Levanda is quite capable of creating eccentric, unusual minor characters like the two students Jules Perets and John Berkovich, one Francophile, the other Anglophile, eking out a livelihood by giving private lessons, whom we first encounter as cheerful adolescents, then as starving young men full of *Weltschmerz*, living in dire poverty and almost driven to suicide. Finally one of them becomes a tool of the Polish uprising as a common soldier. Their wry dialogues counterpoint every high-minded and sober monologue by Sarin. Their motto is "absurd!"; this is the word Berkovich, the humanist, cries out when he kills a Russian officer.

The novel, although generally regarded as tendentious and didactic, actually provides the opportunity for several narrative "voices" to be heard. Nor is the ending, seen as hurried and botched up by contemporaries, as unequivocally poor as was thought. Above all, the author's return at the end to the letter form employed at the beginning is, in fact a highly ingenious solution. Sarin lands in prison, but he is pardoned by a humane judge, and is allowed to emigrate. There he meets his ideological opponents, the Polish noblemen of the town, the organizers of the uprising, who were also forced into exile. They

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 43.

spend their evenings together, reciting their readings, for instance Josephus Flavius, to each other. This little Geneva idyll, far from “destroying” the novel, deprives Sarin of his glory. The revolutionary’s lofty principles are not rewarded by Levanda with a magnificent, tragic fall, not even with a minor accident similar to that of Turgenev’s Bazarov, but simply drowned in a petty-bourgeois swamp. The true endgame is played out in Russia. Polina runs away with the rebels, her father has a stroke and dies, and Polina ends up in a mental asylum. The brightest female character, Mary Tudman is forced into a loveless marriage. Levanda shows through the fate of a Jewish innkeeper that it is the common man who falls victim to the rivalry of the two political powers. The innkeeper betrays the rebels because he suffered a great deal under Polish rule, and his inn is set on fire by the Poles in revenge. The innkeeper reacts by revealing their hiding place to the Cossacks, but during the action he is hit by a bullet and dies. What ruins the effect of Levanda’s novel is not that he finishes off his protagonists, but that he makes it ring false when Sarin finally leaves for home, for Russia. Levanda suggests that Russification became possible by 1864, and this is made into Sarin’s goal.

Despite the above merits, Levanda’s novel is more of an exciting experiment and a document of the age than an enduring literary achievement. The author may have been justified in feeling that the attacks against him were undeserved. Although he did confess in a letter that he lacked the patience to refine his works which he published in the form they had been put on paper, still, in another letter, he gave his own works high marks, especially compared to contemporary European literature and the Jewish literature of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

It has been obvious for quite long now that my modest works, which have found no one to appreciate them, at least not in Russia, are worthy of being made known to readers in Europe. While the cheap, trashy works of Franzos, which have neither “*sens*”⁶⁸ nor a grain of truth or types in them, have all been translated into Russian, my photographically authentic and highly artistic pictures of Jewish life have not found a translator into a foreign language. Even if he were to go on writing for another ten years, Franzos will never achieve the standards of my début, because Franzos is as good a writer of fiction and observer as I am a dancer.⁶⁹

68 Levanda uses the French word for “sense.”

69 Levanda wrote this letter two years before his death and a few months before becoming mentally deranged, on 17 June 1867, to S. Y. Tsitron. The letters were published by Adolf Landau in 1903: “Iz perepiski L. O. Levandy,” *Evreiskaia Biblioteka*, v. 10, Spb. 1903. Karl Emil Franzos’s works were regularly published by *Voskhod*, and his individual works also

The example of Levanda's attempt at a grand novel was followed at the very end of this period by Sergei Yaroshevsky's in his novelette *Early Bird* (1882), discussed in the chapter on Yaroshevsky.

The moral fable-like work *Iashka and Ioshka* (published in 1889) is subtitled literally *A Parallel Drawn after Nature*, that is, "A Parallel Taken from Nature." The story indeed contains a mode-like parallel: it sets the life of two families, a Polish and a Jewish family, side by side, shown as neighbors of the narrator. Levanda strikes an ironic note in the introduction.

Regarding his birth, Kukavka is a Pole, and by social status, a nobleman. Regarding his descent, Krepkh comes from the middle-class, and by his rank he is a Jew. True, being Jewish is not recorded on the list of ranks, yet I always thought that this was a rank, as it is being recorded in every document a Jewish person has, lest any of the numerous special advantages and privileges owed to that rank according to our laws should be dishonoured in the slightest.⁷⁰

In this work, Levanda follows up the customs, habits and lifestyles manifest in all spheres of life from education to the spending of money, from kitchen equipment, food and eating habits to clothing. Jewish terms and words are explained in footnotes. The edge of the ironic narrative tone is directed unequivocally against the Jewish family. The wise Jews, as soon as they got some money, bought silver on it, which they stowed away in a drawer, while the stupid Kukavka bought furniture for his house, and he bought dishes..., and so on, and so forth; every word means its own very opposite, and all should be understood within quotation marks. This sort of irony, however, is unable to carry the narrative for longer than a few pages; the action becomes terribly protracted. Hardly thirty pages into the story, the author's voice, his direct judgement, already intervenes, and the heavily didactic message (a treatise on what is wrong and right) pushes out the irony and smothers the colorfully starting narrative. The author would like to convey his message by demonstrating his ideals via a didactic model, thus stepping over from literature into journalism.

Another later story by Levanda, *How Pardon was Granted by the Angered Baron* (1855), purports to tell a true story according to the introduction (al-

appeared in Russia. This practically forgotten author was the subject of a European and an American book, the two published simultaneously. Hubach, S.: *Galizische Träume. Die jüdischen Erzählungen des Karl Emil Franzos*, 1986; Steiner, C.: *Karl Emil Franzos (1848-1904) Emancipator and Assimilator*, 1990. On Levanda's life-work see also Markish, Sh.: "Stoit li perechityvat' L'va Levandu?" *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve* 3-4 (10-11) [1995].

70 Levanda, L.: "Iashka i Ioshka. Parallel' s natury," *Voskhod* 9 (1889), p. 59.

legedly taken by Levanda from the Polish historian Maciejewski). This is a classical historical anecdote, related to a real historical character. Baron Radziwill arrives home to his estate unexpectedly, precisely on the day of Thisa-be Av, the 9th of a month, when the Jews, commemorating the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, are fasting and praying at the synagogue, failing to notice his arrival and to welcome him duly. The baron orders every Jew to be executed in punishment. They are saved by the cunning of the Catholic priest who has duds put into the guns, and stages a mock execution with the Jews falling one by one, only to rise again miraculously. The gullible baron actually rewards the Jews, in order to compensate for the fear they had to go through, and the story ends with a fairy-tale-like cadence. The atmosphere of the feast put on in honor of the baron fully contradicts that the threat of the execution promised must be taken seriously and gives rise to real fear. The whole scene is theatrical and has a carnival mood, and it is obvious that no blood flows but cranberry juice. The basic anecdote belongs to the kind of *golus-anekdote* (Galut jokes); folk poetry enlists a host of similar funny stories under that name and an entire type group, all about the sudden anger of Polish *pani*, and their miraculous pardoning.⁷¹ There is another itinerant motif in the story: when the whimsical baron wants to travel by sledge in the summertime, the conundrum is solved with genuine riddle-solving ingenuity by the Jews: they advise the bailiff to sprinkle the road with salt.

Similarly to *Iashka and Ioshka*, the introduction to this story is also humorous in tone. On top of it all, it is in no relation to the action; it seems as if the whole point were the story-telling itself. It is worth while to recall the beginning section, the portrait of Prokop, because it is a perfect example of the already mentioned linguistic melange. Prokop is a Pole, the stoker at the bath, doing a job forbidden to Jews on Saturdays. People in the village are so used to his presence that he is widely addressed as “Reb Prokop,” especially by children:

Prokop has grown so accustomed to this respectful title, which he regarded as inalienably his own, so much so that when a Jewish kid forgot, and was careless enough to call him simply by his name, he became at once enraged:

“What a *sheiget*z!* No idea of the *derech-eret*z!** No respect for the *zokon*!*** A *meshumed*,**** that is what’s to become of you, I swear! A rascal like this will never be a good decent Jew, that’s for sure.”⁷²

⁷¹ *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia*, t. II, column 578.

⁷² Levanda’s notes: *: a rogue; **: manners; ***: elders; ****: a convert to Christianity.

Levanda translates words in general usage by Jews, counting on readers who know Russian only. The mixture of languages here has a double-decker kind of humor: A Polish character speaks here like a Jew, in poor Polish, because the Jewish environment is his natural milieu. Levanda suggests without hints or manifest didactic declarations that adjustment may actually be a two-way process in the interest of assimilation. It is unfortunate that Levanda cannot restrain himself enough to stay within the framework of parabolic portrayal. He again "talks out" of his fictional text, inserting discussions that belong to the genre of journalism. One such section, however, provides, at the same time, a highly interesting intertextual reference:

During their many centuries of captivity, the Jews have taken on the nature of dogs. They need so little; a gnawed bone will do fine, or even some waste faintly reminiscent of a bone that is thrown to them. Of all that is characteristic of man, only their belly has been left to them, and all they think of is their belly... They have put on a dog skin, and apparently feel quite comfortable in it; they endure a treatment fit for dogs with an admirable humility...⁷³

The dog fate allegory appears already on the pages of *Turbulent Times* in lines and sentences characterizing the position and fate of Jews. One of Sarin's monologues reads: "I am like a dog which lost its master, and now roams the streets in apathy; there is no one to love, no none to be loyal to, no one to rub up to. A dog like that [...] even gives up barking, because there is no one to protect, to guard."⁷⁴ The dog allegory found its way to Russian-Jewish literature via the translation of Henrich Heine's poem *Prinzessin Sabbat* (1851, the opening piece of Part 3 of the volume *Romanzero*), for which an introductory essay was written by Osip Rabinovich.⁷⁵ Heine's poem is an adaptation of the Jewish tale about a prince turned into a dog. The prince can regain his human shape once in a week with the help of the fairy Princess Sabbath. Rabinovich explains the meaning of the allegory: after a week of living like a dog, a Jew feels human again with the setting in of Saturday. (Also in the ancient metaphoric image in the Saturday prayer of Jews, Saturday appears in the shape of a queen, a bride. Babel, too, uses this reference in his story *Gedali*.) However, in Heine's poem, in line with the late Romantic genre, the fairy-tale hero awakens fairy-tale-like sentiments from its readers. Rabinovich's

⁷³ Ibid., no. 10, pp. 24–5.

⁷⁴ Levanda, L.: *Goriacheie vremia*, Evreiskaia Biblioteka, v. 1. Spb, 1871, p. 54.

⁷⁵ *Rassvet* 18 (1860). Noticed by Shimon Markish.

essay pays more attention to a description of the pitiful “dog weekdays.” In Levanda’s dog allegory, however, a sarcastic irony is also present, mingled perhaps even with contempt.⁷⁶

Grigory Bogrov (1825–1855)

Bogrov opened up a separate path in Russian-Jewish literature. He owes his fame practically to a single work, *Notes of a Jew*, which he began to write at the beginning of the 1860s. The autobiographical novel, running into three-volumes and approximately 1000 pages in its independent form, was published in sequels in 1871–1873 in Nekrasov’s influential journal, *Otechestvennye Zapiski*.⁷⁷ It was the first time that a novel about the life of Jews was coming into the hands of Russian readers. Previous to that, only Rabinovich’s already mentioned novelette, *Refractory Soldier*, won some attention from Russian intellectual circles. Before being published, the text was stylized by Nekrasov and Saltykov-Shchedrin, who may have also suggested changes or made some without being asked to do so. Bogrov’s letters witness the fact that corrections and changes were made also beyond those he made at the request of the editors.⁷⁸ No other work by Bogrov created a similar interest, and he will probably be for ever considered a single-book author by literary history. In the 1870s and 1880s Bogrov also took an active part in the editing and writing of Jewish periodicals.

Bogrov’s critical attitude as a Maskil (enlightener) was directed first and foremost inward, at his own people: he was critical of, and actually hated, the

⁷⁶ The association between dogs and Jews may have non-literary sources as well. Simon Dubnow writes in his *History of the Jewish People*: “The Jewish population was being murdered all over the country, in towns and villages, by the Haidamaks or peasant Cossacks. One of their repulsive jokes was to hang a Polish nobleman, a Jew and dog on trees side by side under the signpost: ‘Here is a Pole, a Jew and a dog, all of the same faith’ (‘Vlakh, zhid i sobaka, Vse vira odnakha’).” Dubnow, S. M.: *History of the Jews*, trans. Moshe Spiegel, 1967, chapter entitled “The Oppression of Polish Jewry (1648–1790),” in connection with the pogrom after 1768.

⁷⁷ From 1868 on, under the editorial leadership of Nekrasov and Saltykov-Shchedrin, it became the journal of the democratic intelligentsia. Nikolai Nekrasov (1821–77/8) was a highly popular poet and a great figure of contemporary Russian literature, most famous for his deeply committed poems dealing with the heavy lot of Russian peasants. Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826–1889) was a prose writer, a satirist with a biting tone, and another well-known and important figure of the literature of the times.

⁷⁸ *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* v. 51–2, 1949, p. 163.

traditional Jewish lifestyle, the closed community, the fanatic adherence to the law, exclusive of the environment. Many Jews thought Bogrov was simply a traitor. His conversion to Christianity was also seen in this light later. (Bogrov converted to the Slavic Orthodox faith a few months before his death to be able to legally marry his long-time companion, and settle the position of his children.) His critics drew far-reaching conclusions from this highly private decision, even though one of Bogrov's letters casts sharp light on the psychological contradiction so acutely felt by assimilating Jewish intellectuals: "I am an emancipated cosmopolitan, in the broad sense of the word. If Jews were not systematically and regularly persecuted in Russia, I might possibly go over to the other side where other sympathies and ideals are being held out to me. But my Jewish brethren in nationality,⁷⁹ some four million people, are suffering innocently. Can an honest man simply wave off an injustice of that size?"⁸⁰ he writes in a letter to Levanda in 1878. Bogrov actually points at a highly important psychological motive which has the power to reconnect even assimilated Jews who lost or left their religious, national and cultural identity, or even their descendants several generations removed, to Jewry and their Jewishness. What is described by Bogrov as the inability to deny the community of fate with those persecuted would become a motive force for Jewish dissimulation amid the circumstances of the anti-Semitism of the 20th century.

Bogrov's *Notes of a Jew* (1871–1873) is an eventful, adventurous, at times sentimental literary autobiography meeting the requirements of the age. It is, however, considerably blemished by the author's mediocre talent and by his tendentious declarations of his opinions. His book, however, is important for two reasons. As I have already mentioned, this was the first time that a work dealing with Jews was accepted by Russian literary public opinion and by the Russian reading public: the other reason for its importance is that Bogrov's novel provides a panoramic view of Jewish life in his age.

In the life story of Yeruhim, the hero's childhood friend, two chapters, distant from one another, are devoted to the bitter lot of Kantonists, to the consequences of the inhuman laws prevailing under Nicholas I. One of the most moving chapters of the book is the description of a Seder spent by the hero as a child in the home of the little Yeruhim. It is one of the Seder rituals to open the door for the Messiah, for whom a glass of wine is poured, and that glass remains untouched. Ten-year-old Yeruhim is afraid to open the door because

79 "Brat'ia po natsii"

80 From the correspondence of Lev Levanda. *Evreiskaia Biblioteka*, v. 10, Spb. 1903.

there is some noise outside. When his friend, the narrator, opens the door, gendarmes rush in together with the representatives of the local Jewish community, and Yeruhim is instantly taken away to be a soldier. Bogrov makes no attempt to hide the fact that the Jews themselves kept *lovetsi*, collaborators of the authorities, for tracking Jews fit for soldiering (including children), who were then sought out and caught. (As it was mentioned above, these substitutes were exchanged for members of their community eligible for military service, see pp. 45–6.) Bogrov's picture, however, is differentiated enough to show that all this was caused by a law brought under Nicholas I, according to which Jewish communities were held responsible as a whole for the actions of each and every one of their members. (On top of it all, when employing this rule, reference was made to the Talmudic teaching that the nation is responsible for the sins of the individual, and responsibility is collective [*poruka* is the Russian word]. Children were given up to the army by the communities because when a breadwinner was taken, then the family left behind had to be supported from the funds of the community.) This was also one of the reasons why Jews, who married early anyway, tried to marry off their children at the earliest possible age in order to ensure them against being called up: some were married already at the age of ten or twelve (even before they would be recognized as adults). The scene, as depicted by Bogrov, does not set Jews and Russians against each other as adversaries; it only has people serving the authorities and others victimized by them. Not even the Russian gendarme is always an anti-Semite looking for a bribe, although there are some examples for that too in his book.⁸¹

The winding path trod by Bogrov's hero through his life provides a panorama of the limited possibilities of life allowed to Jews. The ambitious young man studies book-keeping, languages and commerce as an autodidact. He tries his hand at the typical Jewish professions: makes an attempt at trading, starts a business, becomes an innkeeper, then a *Colonist*. The Russian government gave land, colonies, to Jews in order to get them used to agricultural work. The importance of this act for Jews was the possibility to prove to others, in particular to surrounding peasants who were closely connected to the land, that Jews were capable of physical work, and were not "lazy" or "genetically alien to land, to soil." The colonies failed due to the hostility of these peasants, who did not sell seeds and tools to Jews, and sometimes even set their colonies on fire, as is also depicted in Bogrov's novel.

81 Bogrov, G.: *Zapiski evreia. Sobraniie sochinenii*, 1912, v. 1, pp. 34, 129.

The marriage of the protagonist, made when he was sixteen years old, is hell on earth. In order to turn his life into something human, he must first of all change his dress and shave off his beard, which means symbolically taking on an appearance meeting the requirements of his environment. Meditating over a change of clothes, he makes it apparent through describing a character named Boris Konradovich that dressing differently in itself means nothing: the inner vacuum cannot be concealed either by pipe-smoking or a dress, if all the new lifestyle amounts to is reading cheap novels. Bogrov inserts minor characters into the action, whose only role is often to pose as "aliases" with lives parallel to his own, illustrating variants of his actions and long-term consequences of his decisions. Another character serves as the author's mouthpiece to convey his opinion about the decree issued later by the Tsarist government on the change of dressing habits. In his view, the traditional Jewish costume really distinguishes its wearers, driving them back to the stultifying medieval atmosphere, and is favorable only to the hostile environment: all that it is good for is to make Jews instantly recognizable even from a distance. The skull cap, the *kipa*, is a remnant of the centuries spent in hot climates, and wearing it is unhealthy.⁸² Bogrov's didactic advertisement of his views in such a manner causes irreparable damage to the artistic value of his novel. On the other hand, from a psychological viewpoint, it is very important to see the first indications in Russian-Jewish literature of the kind of intolerance within the Jewish community which, in some cases, may have led not only to the abandoning of the Jewish fate but also to Jewish self-hatred:

However I tried to look at my life—whether I remembered the bitter past, faced the unsuccessful present, or imagined the probable future—on all sides I was struck by an unanswerable question: who is to blame? Of course, first of all, I am to blame: I am a Jew! To be a Jew—that is the most serious crime; it is a sin that can not be erased; it is a brand that Fate impresses at the moment of birth; it is a mustering call for all accusations; it is a mark of Cain on the forehead of an innocent person whom everyone has already judged. The moaning of the Jew doesn't arouse anybody's sympathy. Serves you right: don't be a Jew. No, even that's not enough. Don't be born a Jew.⁸³

Even Bogrov's depiction of the daily suffering due to his failed marriage, arranged by relatives when he was very young may have struck readers as

82 Ibid., pp. 260–70.

83 Ibid, v. 3, p. 407.

something new, and the sentimental love story of the novel was probably regarded as light reading even in his own age. The heart-wrenching character of the lonely piano teacher who, it is suddenly revealed, turns out to be no one else but the one-time childhood love of the hero, and dies of tuberculosis in the hero's arms, was aimed purely at the lachrymals of readers.

Bogrov's autobiographical novel is the most impassioned confession of the age about the fate of the assimilated Jew—a split awareness and sense of being an outcast:

The Jews in this village could not remain indifferent vis-à-vis a brother of theirs who ate Russian food, shaved his face, smoked on Shabbat, did not fast, and, most importantly, lived separated from his lawful wife, and did not register a birth every year or every other year. My position was specific and unbearable: Jews considered me a Russian, but the Russians waited only for the opportunity to tell me that I was a *yid* who had forgotten where his place was.⁸⁴

Bogrov here declares a truth with countless historical examples. A parallel idea was expressed by American sociologist Robert E. Park in 1928 in his famous essay, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," in which he introduced the concept of "cultural hybrid":

When the walls of the medieval ghetto were torn down and the Jews were permitted to participate in the cultural life of the peoples among whom they lived, there appeared a new type of personality, namely a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life... the traditions of two distinct peoples, never quite willing to break with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now sought to find a place. He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies. [...] The emancipated Jew was, and is, historically and typically the marginal man, the first cosmopolite and citizen of the world.⁸⁵

The characteristic and well-selected use of words in this quote illustrates the difference, far from only stylistic, between Jews and a *yid*. If the present study were written in Russian, it would have long included the explanation that in Russia the word *evrei* is more or less neutral, *iudiei* is old-fashioned

⁸⁴ Ibid., v. 3, pp. 277–8.

⁸⁵ Park, R. E.: "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," *American Journal of Sociology* 33 (May 1928), pp. 891–2.

and archaic, somewhat too dignified by today, while *zhid* (= *yid*) is an offensive, derogatory word. According to some widespread views, *yid* did not necessarily have anti-Semitic connotations in the past, and the main supportive argument is that the word was used even by the great Russian writers of the 19th century. Indeed, Dostoevsky uses both words in his *Diary* (for elaborating on his anti-Judaist views).⁸⁶ Unfortunately Turgenev also generalizes his antipathy when choosing the word for the title of a story about a Jew who is a very negative character (*Yid*). He is a treacherous, repulsive old man, not only betraying the Russian army in war, but also prostituting his own daughter, offering her charms to the officers for money. Little more proof for the negative content of the word is needed than the fact that Catherine II, who otherwise applied some highly restrictive measures against Jews, prohibited its use as early as 1786; the word, deemed as offensive, was banned from official documents.⁸⁷

Some of the most convincing passages of Bogrov's novel are found in the parts devoted to his childhood. He conveys through childhood experiences the contradictions of the Jewish lifestyle, the child's revolt against being enclosed, the yearning of healthy life instinct for breaking out of the stuffy "ghetto" world. The first chapter, "The Sufferings of Childhood," portrays the author's loneliness as a child and the contradictory relationship between father and son. The eternally cold and morose father (who also had his share of suffering) never displays the slightest trace of kindness towards his son. "He looked at me like at a worm which could be crushed easily, only it is not worth the effort, since you couldn't crush all the world's worms anyway, and he was right too: my mother had borne him a whole pile of worms like me." The scene of childhood is "a village in a dense, dark forest," where the family lives "in complete isolation." When a visitor is expected, the children are hidden in the kitchen by the family. Srulik, the narrator, studies Hebrew from the age of five. He is a bright child but hates the teacher. "But I was afraid of my stern father, and would spend long hours poring over my notebook, even though the sun shone brightly in the courtyard, the birds chattered cheerfully, and I would have liked so much to run up and down, leaping into the high grass rich in juices!"⁸⁸

The opposition between lifeless study and the inviting call of nature keeps broadening as Srul's longing to be away becomes more personal. At the age of

86 Dostoevsky, F.: *Dnevnik pisatel'a za 1877 g.*, 1951, pp. 97-117.

87 Doubnov, S.: *Histoire moderne de peuple juif*, t. 1, 1933, p. 356.

88 Bogrov, op. cit., v. 1, pp. 56, 57.

seven, he is already sent to a different town to study on, where he gradually forgets his family, and lives in a miserable hole with a dirty Jewish family, in the cruel world of the Jewish school. One day a gentile family moves into the house next door. "The smell of unfamiliar delicacies" fills the air, there is cleanliness, "flowerpots are peeking from behind white curtains," and the cheerful noise of happy children is heard. Beside childish envy, Bogrov also depicts stormy teenage emotions when he describes the sister and brother living in the house in the words of the Jewish boy. Srul, hungry for child company, actually falls in love with both of them, with the girl as well as the boy, in a manner typical of young adolescents. He takes delight in the appearance of the twelve year old boy; he is attracted by his "full face," "fine mouth," "strong, supple, healthy movement."⁸⁹ The power of the descriptions is intensified by their contrast with the Jewish environment. As opposed to the kind Russian mother, full of tender words, there is the forever cursing, repellent Jewish witch. The Russian children are "healthy, happy, playful and free," in contrast to which Srul's life is spent in "humiliation, need and captivity."⁹⁰ Self-hatred also flares up in the self-portrait which Bogrov contrasts with his description of the gentile children:

My gaze fell upon the piece of mirror fastened to the wall, I caught a glimpse of myself and shuddered. My cheekbones were jutting out sharply from a disproportionately long, irregular, yellowish-pale face; my long, thin-haired sidelocks looked like worms, I had a disproportionately long and thin neck and no necktie; my puny body and thin legs ending in clumsy shoes created such an irrepressible disgust in me that I turned away and spat out.⁹¹

The accumulation of negative words speaks for itself; the image reflected in the mirror departs from the inner desires, and anticipates the state of Jewish self-observation and split self-image. The child, already at the edge to self-hatred, used to feel like a worm under the gaze of his father; by now he has come to accept that negative image. In his idealizing descriptions of the Russian family, the author uses tripled rhetoric structures for enhancing the effect, and his sentences with an anaphoric beginning also have triple repetitions. (Cf. "dear, good, highly moral"; "love, friendship, gratefulness"; "hon-

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 74-5.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 81. Compare with the twofold mirror image in Lev Lunts's story, *The Homeland*, Part IV.

esty, goodness and humanity"; etc.) Srul learns Russian in this family, but he is also taught to keep his person and clothes clean, and even to use a handkerchief for blowing his nose. His girl playmate (and his love whom he is to meet again later) separates him for ever from traditional Jewishness by giving him a new Russian name, Grisha, and by playfully cutting off the boy's side-locks in an erotic scene. Following the scandal that erupts because of this, Srul is moved away, and the children do not see each other any more.

It is the introduction of the child's eye view which lends authenticity to the excitingly different world of the gentiles and the heavy burden of Jewish life. The unprejudiced vision of the child is capable of setting incompatible and incommensurable things side by side, thus the sense of uncertainty due to the duality of self identification can be reflected with a special clarity by employing that vision. Rational arguments and emotional causes alike play a role in this ambivalence; the approach is at once internal and external, committed and critical. This aspect of Bogrov's prose is an artistic discovery which provides an apparently inexhaustible method for the depiction of the dual affiliation in Jewish literature as well as other literatures dealing with assimilation up to this day.⁹²

More than a hundred years later, Bogrov's novel today represents an invaluable document on a bygone world for readers and researchers alike: an ethnographically precise and also captivating account of Jewish life and customs.⁹³ In its own age as well as for later authors in Russian-Jewish literature, *Notes of a Jew* was much more useful as a source and as an inexhaustible store of situations, motifs and information than Levanda's works had been, because it portrayed a poorer and much more populous segment of society. Not only his footnotes but also the anecdotes and description of customs inserted in the action have a source value. The anecdotes are embedded by Bogrov in the plot structure of his grand epic-type text. They include the exchange of dead bodies, the story of "the brave and the cowardly Jew facing highwaymen," and a whole chapter about a witch—that appears to be a regular horror story, with miracles added—right until it turns out in the end that the strange behaviour of the girl was caused by simple carbon monoxide poisoning. This revelation, meant to expose superstition is a worthy companion piece to the story attacking Hassidism and unveiling the miracle-making of a *Tzaddik*. The *Tzaddik* prophesies a bright future for the newborn, but soon after his departure the

⁹² See also in Chapter 4.

⁹³ On Bogrov also Safran, G.: *Rewriting the Jew. Assimilation Narratives in the Russian Empire*, 2000, pp. 26–62.

baby suddenly becomes sick. The *Tzaddik* is called back, and miraculously cures the baby, which has been yelling for days, with a single stroke. The secret of the miracle is that during his first visit he plugs an oat-grain into the anus of the child, which he simply takes out upon his second visit. The same story about the “oat-grain ‘curing’” appears also in Hekht’s work, which will also be discussed in this book (*The Man Who Forgot his Life*).⁹⁴

The other character of Bogrov to appear in the work of subsequent Russian-Jewish authors as well is that of the eccentric tramp. His tramp, Khaikel, was a scholar once; now he is everybody’s clown. His philosophy is that religion cripples people, yet the only thing that really matters is “Man” with a capital “M,” a being thoroughly of this world. He disdains religious Jew and assimilated Jew alike with the cynicism of utter disillusionment. Khaikel retires from society. He roams and lives on the road, he has nothing to tie him to anyone or anything, yet he cannot throw off being Jewish. Here too, Bogrov looks ahead when he creates a type out of the character of the Jew trying to escape from his identity but unable to do so: the type of the modern wandering Jew. The state of being pushed to the periphery or living there in a self-exile is within a hair’s breadth from the category of the eccentric, yet separated by a gulf from either of the two cultures and social value systems between which he was unable choose, and which he rejects. This figure was to become a *topos* of homelessness later; in the 20th century we see him again in the works of Hekht and especially Andrei Sobol, both of which will be discussed in my book. This type is also the central figure of Yakov Rombro’s strange novel written ten years later, entitled *Notes of a Mad Orem-Bokher*.

Yakov Rombro (1852–1922)

Rombro’s literary fiction makes up only a part of his work in Russian and mainly in Yiddish as a writer and journalist, but it is nevertheless quite remarkable. In its form, the title *Notes of a Mad Orem-Bokher* (1881)⁹⁵ implies a reference to Bogrov’s novel (*Notes of a Jew*), but it is far less neutral. By inserting a Hebrew word, the author actually declares his commitment, as it were,

94 Hekht, S.: *Chelovek, kotoryi zabyl svoiu zhizn'*, 1927, p. 30.

95 Rombro, Y.: *Zapiski sumashedshego orem-bokhera*, 1881.

to the internal, Jewish viewpoint. That is what he means to emphasize (since otherwise he may very well have substituted "a poor young man" or something similar) but at the same time, by the adjective connected to it ("mad"), he reverses this identification in a rather striking way, at once distancing himself from his subject. (According to the explanatory note attached to the title, "An orem-bokher is a young yeshiva student who has lunch in the home of a different Jewish family every day.")⁹⁶ And the story leaves the reader to decide whether there is another switch in the text, and whether the word "mad" does or does not contain ironic or self-ironic overtones.

The first-person-singular narrator of the novella, similarly to Bogrov's work tells his life story starting with his childhood. He describes the family, the Talmud-Torah, and the yeshiva where he became obsessed with the Messianic idea. Hoping for the imminent coming of the Messiah, he is desperately looking for a solution whereby it might be hurried up. According to the Talmud, the Messiah will come when everyone will be either righteous or everyone guilty, and since he believes this is impossible because there always will be an exception or two, the only solution is that everyone must die.⁹⁷ The call to "be fruitful and multiply" applied to the Biblical ancestors only; what must be done in the present is just the opposite. He becomes so obsessed with this idea that he signs up for preaching at the synagogue, and tells his theory. In the grip of a Messianic frenzy, he preaches that the people of Israel must disappear from this earth in order to hasten the coming of the Messiah. "Drown yourself in water, hang yourself, set yourself on fire, and disappear!"⁹⁸ he urges, and keeps visiting the outskirts of town, where he chalks Kabbalistic symbols on the walls, then fabricates a Golem from mud, but when it refuses to come to life, he suddenly loses his faith. The internal change of the hero turned atheist is narrated in a long parable, an allegorical dream, by Rombro. The storyteller is standing on top of a pile of books, and from that vantage point he sees the Messiah coming on a shaky horse. The pile suddenly tumbles down, and the narrator falls into a wet, stinking pit, where he is offered a heavenly meal, but it has a stench too. It turns out that in heaven nobody ever heard about either Moses or the Talmud.

Another of his relevant stories is a parable in which Moses descends to earth once again because Satan has mocked the Lord by pointing at the faith-

96 *Voskhod* 4-5 (1882), p. 167.

97 See later pp. 147-148. In David Aizman's story *Rue de Rosier*, Mark jumps out of the window in the name of the same Kabbalistic idea.

98 *Voskhod* 4-5 (1882), p. 190.

lessness of the Jews. However, Moses fails to recognize the laws of the Bible in the strange rituals of the synagogue or the complicated and illogical custom practiced at home, so the rabbi, referring to the authority of the Talmud, declares him unfaithful, and chases him out of the village.

The parable is reminiscent of Dostoevsky's famous tale of Grand Inquisitor (in the *Brothers Karamazov*) in which Christ comes back to earth, but is rejected by the Inquisitor in the name, and for the sake of, the alleged happiness of mankind. The Inquisitor cites "back" at Jesus all his teachings as dogmas, much in the same way as the Talmudic interpretations of the Mosaic laws and the dogmatic rules concluded from them are set against the texts of the Torah by Rombro. Dostoevsky's novel was published in 1878–1879, a year before Rombro's work.

In a last chapter following the parable, Rombro also explains in a form reminiscent of a philosophical treatise why the rejection of first the Talmud, then the Mosaic teachings are logical developments along the road to religious disillusionment. At the end of the novel, his hero sets out on a search, looking for a new town and new schools to find his way back to pure Mosaic law.⁹⁹ But the new school is just another yeshiva, thus his path-seeking does not take him outside the borders of Jewish life.

"Cholera Wedding" (1884)

This theme emerges first in Russian-Jewish literature in Bogrov's novel mentioned above, *Notes of a Jew*, where it is given a whole chapter to prove Jewish superstitions.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, Sándor Scheiber, who collected the occurrences of the motif known to him under the title *Wedding in a Cemetery* had no knowledge of Bogrov's work. Advancing chronologically, Scheiber discovers the motif first in Mendele Moykher Sforim's *Fishke the Lame* (Chapter 5), a work already quoted several times, but he mentions also its later appearances with Julian Strykowski and Isaac Bashevis Singer, and he even mentions an actual real-life wedding held in a cemetery during the time of the

⁹⁹ The stringent Jewish sect rejecting the Talmud and the Rabbinic scripts and accepting only the five Mosaic books, the Karaites, may also have had an influence on Rombro, who may have known the Karaites in Thrace. On Karaites see Koestler, A.: *The Thirteenth Tribe. The Khazar Empire and its Heritage*, 1976; Wexler, P.: *The Ashkenazic Jews. A Slavo-Turkic People In Search of a Jewish Identity*, 1993.

¹⁰⁰ Bogrov, G.: *Zapiski evreia*, v. 1, Chapter 7, pp. 154–80.

Plague in 1865.¹⁰¹ (It is not impossible that the old custom was brought back into public awareness by this particular wedding in 1865, but it is also possible that such weddings were still actually held in the 19th century in the Pale of Settlement.)

The ritual act of wedding in the cemetery does not derive from the laws of Judaism but is a typical folk custom. Its ritual logic is highly similar to that of the medieval carnival: death must be scared off by a festival affirmative of life, and it is life that should be set against death. The system of imagery of folk festivals, regarded as universal in its approach by Bakhtin, is different from this in so far as Bakhtin was analyzing ambivalent rites making a mockery of death, while in this case we are dealing with an act of magic power dominated, instead of cheerfulness, by desperation. Therefore this may possibly be even more grotesque than any medieval or traditional carnival: having fun with skeletons during a festival is the very reverse of putting on a festival during a cholera epidemic. In the latter, the presence of death is something almost palpable, carried not only by the victims of the epidemic but also by the dead buried in the cemetery. This is not the kind of grotesqueness attributed to festivals by Bakhtin; it is not characterized by "destructive humor"; the "gay, liberating and regenerating element of laughter, which is precisely the creative element."¹⁰² However, carnival weddings (and their description found in Rabelais's work) still have many things in common with Jewish cemetery weddings, first and foremost that the couple to be married is generally destitute, crippled or mentally retarded.¹⁰³

Rombro wrote a separate work about a wedding staged in a cemetery during an epidemic. His narrative stays within the confines of the Jewish milieu, while the genre of his work is the kind of anecdotal picture so characteristic of his age. His four static chapters add up to a strict structure. The description of the cholera epidemic is followed by an account of the life story and character of Minke, the third part introduces the miserable couple Noseless Khaike and Berke Nelom, while, the cholera wedding actually takes place in the fourth, with the point of the story being left to the twenty-line closing chapter.

101 Scheiber, S.: "A zsidó folklór Ujvári Péter írásaiban," *Folklór és tárgytörténet* III, 1984, pp. 268–9; In English, see Scheiber, S.: *Essays on Jewish Folklore and Comparative Literature*, 1985.

102 Bakhtin, M.: *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'a i renesansa*, 1965, p. 67. See also: Bakhtin, M.: *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky, 1984, p. 51.

103 Bakhtin on the wedding. See *ibid.*, pp. 189–96.

Rombro's work is a clear example that the strategy of the narration and the choice of the distance, even its constant shifting, are cardinal features of Russian-Jewish literature. The success or failure of the omission of tendentious, didactic declarations by the author—in other words, the exclusive use of the literary idiom and passage into genuine literary fiction—hinges upon the way this is accomplished.

The first chapter describes cholera, the epidemic and the disaster in the various voices of the narrator. The first distress call is followed by a portrayal of a village frozen motionless; the traces and impressions of vanished life being conveyed in effective images by Rombro: there is utter silence all over the marketplace, the dried-up tracks in the mud made by the wheels of carriages that once passed by; all "life" and motion is confined to the cemetery. On the street corners where dung heaps are being burnt in the hope that their stench would chase the cholera away, unsuspecting children are playing with the fire. In the process as the reportage-like scenes pass by, the narrator is increasingly carried away, and cries out in distress increasingly often: "Poor grave-diggers!" "Calm down, oh, unhappy soul!"; "Oh, my God, all the bitter tears pouring day after day...." Cries of woe (Oh...; Ah...; Oh God!) are followed by poetic peaks. His tripartite rhetoric structures mould the text into one of rhythmic pathos: ("moaning, weeping, fear"; "heart-wrenching cries of sorrow, loud sobbing, endless lamentation").¹⁰⁴ The Ashkenazi Hebrew call for funeral march—"Tzdoko tatzel bemooves! Giving in charity saves from mortality"—is repeated three times, and the Talmudic legend about the rampage of the angel of death is also narrated in an exalted, poetic manner. Then he addresses the cholera as if it were a person, posing a string of poetic questions to it: how long does it want to go on torturing the unhappy people? Finally he starts to curse it. When describing the people escaping into prayer and fasting at the synagogue, he adopts the thoughts of the inhabitants of the village, the broken, incoherent sentences of terror leading to the conclusion that Yahweh visited this terrible punishment on them for their crimes, and the only thing they can do against it is to turn on the cholera.

You just wait, cholera! You will soon see who you are trying to mess with! You will be challenged to a duel, and, for once, you will be the one for whom the funeral march will be played and the dance of life and happiness danced over the grave of your countless victims, right in the very centre of your dark empire... So you'd better take care; think twice before trifling with Minke, the Governess!¹⁰⁵

104 Rombro, Y.: "Kholernaia svad'ba," *Voskhod* 6 (1884), pp. 13, 14, 10.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

This ironic closing sentence is the only warning that the lofty, broad romantic flow of the account of the peril is not going to continue in the same manner. Regarding his point of view and style thus far, Rombro's first narrator could have been a member of the community portrayed, but a marked turn is setting in now. In the characterization of Minke, the "heroine" of the second chapter, the emergence of narrative distance is indicated by a vocabulary with decidedly negative connotations. Minke is chatty, gossipy, with a slovenly look and an untidy dress. Rombro, however, does not create a character but describes a type, and—in the best tradition of realist prose—the edge of his critique is directed against the circumstances responsible for the phenomenon. One constituent element of this is a typical childhood, a generalized life story:

As was the custom always and everywhere in the good old times, Minke became a wife already at the age of nine, or had been married at least. The frail and undeveloped little girl shed bitter tears when all those lovely black tresses of hers landed on the ground, cut off by the merciless razor... She was married off like chicken taken to be sold at the fair, and her husband was a shy, sickly eleven-year-old boy who was as afraid of her as she was of him. That was how her affluent and God-fearing parents had decided as soon as Minke was born to this world of the Lord, and that was what the good people did, keeping their word and promise. It was a gentle and pleasing young couple, no doubt! The wife was running about in the courtyard, her head carefully covered with a scarf, with her girl friends, while her husband sat in the *cheder*, and got smacks from the Melamed. When they met at lunch, they would blush at the cheerful teasing of the happy parents, stole furtive glances at each other, then run in opposite directions. But they soon got accustomed to the new situation, and the blessed Minke bore some two dozen children for her husband, only half of whom were still alive at the time of the cholera.¹⁰⁶

Minke was installed in her father-in-law's business which, after a while, she ran independently and profitably. She won the nickname "Governess" when, at a time of massive charging and arrests of Jews, she traveled to visit the governor, and managed to halt the case in one way or another. Minke is the leader of the village, the organizer of charitable actions, but her favorite occupation is matchmaking, and the cholera wedding is also her idea. The storyteller's tone in the second chapter is reminiscent of Osip Rabinovich's and Levanda's ironic portrayal and satirical approach (I am thinking of the basic

¹⁰⁶ The book is quoted at such lengths because of the inaccessibility of the text, extant on microfilm only.

note characteristic of *Khayim-Shulim* and some pages of *The Inherited Candlestick*, as well as Levanda's *Iashka and Ioshka*), but it is sharper, more critical, and perhaps sardonic as well:

It is an extremely difficult task to relate all the things that Minke accomplished throughout her glorious and exemplary life; a complete list of her miraculous deeds and heroic acts would take as long as the Jewish Galut [exile] itself. She did many a good thing pleasing God, but the number of her ridiculous and odd actions may be even greater, and if someone should want the details, not being satisfied with that which is written, can easily learn all that is to know from any of the inhabitants of the small town S., where the legend of the God-fearing and dear governess of S. is certain to be handed down from generation to generation!¹⁰⁷

The above ending of the second chapter not only makes the satirical distance obvious but also separates the whole narrative from reality in a playful manner, since to track down the details of a story in an unnamed town would be clearly impossible. It is more or less the same thing as the ending, common in East-European folk tales and anecdotes: "if you don't believe it, go seek out the truth and prove it otherwise." The increasingly pointed irony of the storyteller borders on the profane in the third chapter:

Minke herself was not spared by cruel fate. The Lord first took her husband, whom she mourned out of a sense of duty only, but then the accursed cholera took away about a dozen of her countless offspring. All of them were such good and gifted children (it is well known that after their death, all people are outstandingly good, wise and honest) that Minke's heart was broken. [...] But not even death would deter this restless woman who, God-fearing and kind-hearted as she was, was bound to be appointed commander of some paradisiacal sub-unit after her death, for no one had the slightest doubt that she would go to Heaven.¹⁰⁸

The Greek and Roman reminiscences and metaphors (Rome and Coriolanus, Hymeneia, Arcadia, Sparta)¹⁰⁹ appearing here represent an external element beside, and also opposed, to the Hebrew words and cultural references in the narrative, and, while "classicizing" it, also serve as added tools for

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 25. The explanation in parentheses is a part of the original. The expression "from generation to generation" is a Biblical one, "dor vador" or "dor ledor," also an obligatory element of prayers and ritual texts.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., seq. pp. 28, 30, 34 and pp. 31, 45.

creating a distance and for widening the gap, emphasizing the separation between the narrator and his subject.

The hapless couple picked for the wedding is introduced in the third part. The negative meaning of their very names clearly suggests that they are the outcasts of the village. Noseless Khaike was an undernourished child, already five years old when she learned to walk. Her drunken father beat her until her nose got flattened. After she was orphaned, she spent her days begging under the patronage of Minke and, legend has it, the girl, while crippled in body and mind, and given to violent outbreaks, collected quite a fortune. Still, she was very much yearning to become a wife at last.

The fourth chapter of Rombro's work begins with a poetic but gloomy, in other words, "negative" landscape portrayal: "the declining sun is looking askance at the sinful earth," "the irregular, ugly streets are vacant and lifeless," "nowhere a soul, everybody has vanished," "the gate of the cemetery is aged and tumbling."¹¹⁰ The customary wedding speech is recited before the dismal funeral-wedding march: "Be gay, bride and groom!," the full text of the *ketuba* (traditional marriage contract written in Aramaic) is read out. Rombro calls the scene a "comedy," speaks openly about irony and farce, thus he makes authorial interventions in his work: "It is as if the dead had risen from their sorry graves to sprinkle with their tears this best of all worlds, in which they wept so much during their lifetime."¹¹¹

The name Berke Nelom means "nonexistent," because its bearer, a useless idiot, is so unfit for life that he cannot even be included on the list of inhabitants. Unlike Russian religious culture, Jewish culture does not recognize madmen and idiots as sacred, but at the same time the community has to provide for them in the name of universal charity. The story of the cholera wedding doubtlessly raises grotesque elements combining seemingly antagonistic—tragic and comical, sacred and profane—elements. The divine command of "multiply and increase" is one of the fundamental guiding principles of the life of Jews. This law is being obeyed even here in the cholera wedding of non-human or half-human Jews who, at the same time, also fill the role of sacred sacrifice. However, only the act of the birth of their progeny is positive or affirmative of life; the family itself is a caricature of life, and its background is utter misery:

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 39, 41

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 45.

That was how two beings were bound together for a lifetime and for the good of the human race; two beings whom the wise Spartans would have sent back to the other world the moment they were born. [...] Next day, the cholera took Minke, the last pillar of the town of S. Many fresh graves were dug by the cholera, seizing and taking many people to its dark empire, but the protests of Israel were not in vain: nine months later to the day, Khaika blessed the God-fearing town of S. with another hungry mouth to feed...

This ending of the story leaves little doubt that Rombro not only criticizes, but passes judgement upon all that he has told.

The cholera wedding is one of the most interesting itinerant motif of East European Jewish folklore. Mendele Moykher Sforim's *Fiske the lame* was not even able to get hold of a bride at this sort of an event:

He was even forgotten and passed by when a cholera groom was selected. Don't you know what a cholera groom is? When panic broke out because of the cholera, the community at Idiotsk gathered all kinds of repulsive and alarming-looking cripples, beggars and tramps, who were then married to females suiting them at a wedding in the cemetery, among the graves, hoping to frighten off the epidemic.¹¹²

Ilya Ehrenburg's Lasik Roitschwantz is another child born out of such a marriage. In his novel written in 1928, however, Ehrenburg already lends the kind of fun to his story which Bakhtin speaks about:

There was a big cholera epidemic at that time... Death could not be deceived. But if cunning is no help against death, the Jews thought, then maybe it can be put into a better mood. Let it have some fun. And that was when they came upon Motel Roitschwantz, the most luckless Jew in the world, who had not a penny in his pocket... a man for whom no one would have shed a tear if he had died of cholera. So the rich Jews picked out this Roitschwantz, got hold of an unfortunate wench... I don't know if death had some fun or not, because, to tell you the truth, the groom, beside his family name, also had a huge hump, and the bride was lame.¹¹³

Semyon Hekht's novella, *The Man Who Forgot His Life*, to be treated in detail in Part IV, was published only a year earlier, in 1927. Hekht, who was in-

¹¹² See p. 43, Chapter I, footnote 11.

¹¹³ Ehrenburg, I.: *Burnaia zhizn' Lazika Roitshvanetsa*, 1929, p. 17. See also: *Lazik Rojtšvanec. Nachdruck der Ausgabe Berlin 1929. Centrifuga—Russian Reprintings and Printings*, 1974. In English: *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz*, trans. Leonid Borochowicz and Gertrude Flor, 1960.

timately connected to Jewish culture, had a very different interpretation of the cemetery wedding from that of Ehrenburg, a man not bound to the system of Jewish customs by his upbringing. On the eve of the wedding of Hekht's protagonist, Isaac Seltz, war breaks out, his future father-in-law dies, and an epidemic begins. Seltz would prefer to put off the wedding but the inhabitants of the Jewish quarter do not allow it:

When Seltz heard it, he was horrified, but he did not speak out. The news of the black wedding already spread in the town. They were looking for beggars, but they had all fled from town. The black wedding is staged in the cemetery. The Jews of Vinnitsa believed that the wedding would be a peace offering, and as soon as the lips of the young couple met in a kiss, the rage of the epidemic would be stopped. Weddings of this kind are paid for by public money, the whole town gets together in the cemetery, and there will be drinking and revelry.¹¹⁴

114 Hekht, S.: *Chelovek, kotoryi zabyl svoiu zhizn'*, 1927, pp. 19–20. See more pp. 198–205.

II. "IN A MAELSTROM"—AFTER THE POGROMS

The pogroms as a watershed

It has been mentioned several times in this book, that the pogroms of 1881–1882 represent an extremely sharp dividing line in the history of Russian-Jewish literature. There had been pogroms in the Pale of Settlement earlier: Jewish communities had been the victims of periodical Cossack raids ever since the Bogdan Khmelnytsky uprising in the mid-17th century. Urban pogroms, however, began in the 19th century, the most infamous being those in Odessa (1821, 1859). These would usually be started by the local Greek population around Easter, on the pretext that the Jews were “offending” their religious festival by keeping their shops open on Sunday. It was in Odessa in 1871 that the first major riots which could be regarded as precedents of the great pogroms, or their “dress rehearsal,” also took place, the sheer size of which took even the authorities by surprise, at least according to the report of the governor (A. Dundukov-Korsakov).¹ Compared to these local conflicts, the wave of pogroms starting in 1881 was different: it spread like brushfire, and covered very large areas. The events of the pogrom can be put together from the reports of the committee set up subsequently. The committee was headed by the freshly appointed reactionary Minister of the Interior, N. P. Ignatiev, replacing the liberal Loris-Melikov in May 1881. According to most historians, one of the reasons triggering off the pogrom was the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. The Tsar was killed on 1 March, 1881, and the pogroms started on 15 April in Elizavetgrad. Previous to it, rumors that pogroms would

¹ As a matter of fact, this pogrom was the actual reason why the centre of Jewish culture was shifted to St. Petersburg, where Jews had not been allowed to live before. The lasting presence of anti-Semitism in Odessa was marked by a series of further pogroms in 1881, 1886, 1905–1909. Odessa was at the top of all statistics on destruction. See: *Kievskii i odesskii pogromy v otchotakh senatorov Turau i Kuzminskogo*, 1907.

be launched against the Jews in revenge had been spread with great zeal by the anti-Semitic press in Odessa. The rapid spread of the pogroms was caused by the mistaken belief, widely held among the people, that Jews were outside the law, and therefore the government would do nothing to protect their property and personal security.² (This is worth remembering when reading Yaroshevsky's *In a Maelstrom*.) This misinformation also seemed to be supported by the fact that the military and the gendarmes were actually idly standing by, because they had not received orders to intervene. (This was to remain a characteristic feature of the pogroms later on as well, during the Kishinev pogroms of 1903 and the pogroms of 1905, as attested by Aleksandr Kipen's 1909 story *At the Crossroads*, see next chapter.) In many places, the word was that the pogroms had been in fact approved by the government. In certain localities, members of official organizations actually took part in the looting. Groups of drunken railwaymen traveled from village to village, spreading the mood which triggered off the pogroms. The uniformed railwaymen employed by the government lent a semblance of "official action" to what was being done against the Jews. The situation was made worse by the flood of peasants who were pouring into the city from the nearby villages at the news, in the hope of a rich bounty to be looted from the wealth of the Jews. The gentile population stood idly by or actually went to the sites to watch the spectacle.

The Elizavetgrad riots were suppressed after three days by army troops arriving freshly on the spot. On April 20, the pogrom was successfully stamped out in Kishinev before it could have begun. In Berezovka (25 April), however, not a single Jewish house was left standing out of 159, and in Ananiev (27 April) the false rumor emerged for the first time that the Tsar had been murdered by the Jews, in retaliation to which authorities ordered that Jews be attacked, only it was then kept secret by the local authorities. By the time these vague rumors reached the province of Kiev, the word was that the army would assist in the pogroms. In Kiev, at the beginning (23 April), passions were still curbed. On the 26th, however, the pogrom broke out, and was characterized, according to the report of the committee, by a massive and conspicuous presence of workers directed by well-dressed instigators. The events in Kiev started a wave of lootings which spread to forty-eight surrounding villages,

2 Gessen, Iu.: *Istoriia evreiskogo naroda v Rossii*, v. 2, 1927, p. 215. The Russian pogroms can be read about in ample detail in Dubnow's already mentioned work and in Gessen's history. In my book, a literary history, only a summary of events can be provided.

combined with "Jew-beatings" in some places. After Zhmerinka and Chernigov, the wave of violence reached Konotop, where it claimed the first death. This was also the first town where the Jews organized self-defence forces in an attempt to resist the attackers. The pogroms reached the territories in Volhynia, while in Kiev, the riots which had first begun on May 3 and were suppressed once already, were flaring up again and again. Neither were the Jewish agricultural colonies in the area (Aleksandrovsk, Novomoskovsk, Orekhov, Grafskaia, Sladkovodnaia) spared by the wave of destruction and violence which spread like a plague. The report of the committee revealed some amazing things. After the pogrom in Melitopol, for example, the peasants returned the looted property to the Jews. In the town of Pereyaslavl, the place where most Jews had fled from Kiev, looting of Jewish property broke out two months later. In Borisov, on 12 June, a few peasants were killed by the soldiers ordered there because of the disruptions. Weapons were also used in Nezhin, but order could not be restored for three days (20–22 July). The period of calm lasted until November, when anti-Jewish passions flared up again, with Odessa being the scene of the largest incident. In the spring of 1882, a new but somewhat weaker wave of pogroms started in the scenes of the earlier ones and also in some new ones. The most serious disturbances took place in the town of Balta and the neighboring areas (Letichev, Kamenets, Mogilyov) and in Podolia.³

In 1909 new documents were brought to light on the pogroms of 1881–1882, exposing, on the basis of evidence from eyewitnesses (both Jewish and gentile), the activity of the centrally organized movement inciting anti-Jewish sentiment, launching riots according to the same pattern in the settlements along the railway line. (Groups would arrive by train with lists of the addresses of Jewish houses at the ready, informing the local authorities in advance and asking inaction from them, etc.)⁴

Contemporary investigations attributed the pogroms, despite the fact that they were associated with religious festivals, not to religious or racial antipathy but to factors that were unambiguously economic in nature. Russian peasants and merchants felt that the Jews were getting rich without work, and that Russians were being driven out by the competition and losing ground. It was

3 On the pogroms, beside the stories of Gessen and Dubnow, see also: Vital, D.: *A People Apart. The Jews in Europe: 1789–1939*, 1999, pp. 281–97. Aronson, I. M.: *Troubled waters: The Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia*, 1990.

4 *Evreiskaia Starina*, 1909.

also said that Russian peasants only found a suitable target in the Jews for their impotent rage due to misery and oppression, social outcasts with limited rights themselves. The government first issued some contradictory statements calling the pogroms “not a movement against the Jews but subversive actions in general to provoke unrest,”⁵ then blamed Anarchists (Tsar Alexander III said this to a Jewish delegation seeking audience with him). The “economic explanation” came in handy for the Tsarist government, which realized that by referring to economic causes it would be easier to describe what happened as a manifestation of popular will. Following that discovery, committees were established in the provinces in order to examine in which economic spheres the activity of the Jews had a “harmful effect” on the “true-born population,” and what governmental and legal measures should be taken to allay the genuinely bitter conflicts which led to the disturbances. A part of the proposals suggested by the committee led by Ignatiev developed into the measures which became known as the “Provisional Rules” (*vremennyye pravila*), issued on May 2, 1882, essentially imposing restrictions on the Jews, thus punishing the Jews themselves for the pogroms, and strengthening the protection of Russian interests. That was how the government wanted to calm down Russian anger, because public opinion was generally outraged by the fact that the government used armed force against the population in defence of the Jews. The Committee for the Arrangement of the Life of Jews (*Komitet po ustroistvu byta evreiev*) established earlier was dissolved because its members urged the lifting of restrictions, and set up a Jewish Committee (*Komitet o evreiaxh*) instead, headed by Gotovtsev, a friend of the Minister of the Interior. It did not take long for this committee to develop its “expert opinion,” the text of which exhibits the direct influence of the Book of Kahal, one of the well known sources of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.⁶ The report is teeming with words like “aliens” and “new arrivals,” and with suggestions that Jews have an all-European organization influencing politics all over Europe, and this organization is called Alliance Israélite Universelle. The report was followed by the banning of the Enlighteners’ Society of Russian Jews (*Obshchestvo rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdru evreiami Rossii*), active since the 1860s, and by a series of other restrictions named “Provisional” only because, it was thought, these would set the stage for a whole system of restricting laws to be worked out soon. The planned measures included that Jews would be prohib-

5 Letter by Grand Prince Vladimir Aleksandrovich to Baron Horace Ginzburg of (the latter was a Jew and patron of Jewish culture), *Rassvet* 19 (1881).

6 Gessen, t. 2, p. 222.

ited from moving, from buying property outside their place of residence, from building a house or leasing the one they already had, from directing and disposing of it and from trading in spirits. Villages would have been given the right to deport Jews by a simple majority vote (this took a two-thirds majority up to then), and could have initiated the removal of Jews from the estates of nobles (see later *The Horse Trader* by Kipen). It was also raised as a proposal that Jews should also be forbidden to pursue trades outside their place of residence, and that they should not be allowed to keep their shops open on Christian holidays. Only a small part of the planned moves was included in the measures actually issued because they were not approved by the ministers concerned. So the Jews were "only" forbidden to settle in the villages and in towns outside the Pale of Settlement. Ignatiev was relieved of his post, the Gotovtsev Committee disbanded, and an inter-ministry commission was established, headed by Count Palen, which was to deal with the Jewish question for the next five years. The commission also hired external experts to supply material to it, including works by such distinguished authors as the overview *Anti-Jewish Movement in 1881-1882 in Russia* by Simon Dubnow or an analysis by the famous Russian author Nikolai Leskov entitled *Jews in Russia: Some Observations on the Jewish Question*.⁷ After five years it became clear that the sharp divisions existing between views inside the government made even the minimum proposals they were able to agree on impossible to implement. (They succeeded in annulling a single law only: a rule that a Jew could not have a gentile employee had still been in force ever since Nicholas I.) Thus the commission decided to dissolve itself in 1888, but by doing so it gave a free hand to the government to order new restrictions, primarily in the field of education.

The Russian government had been making efforts for decades to drive Jewish youths into state-owned, Russian-language schools. By the time of the pogroms, however, the ratio of Jewish children in the schools was seen as too high, and the Governor of Minsk made a proposal already in 1878 to reduce that number by introducing a *numerus clausus*, or Jewish quota corresponding to the ratio of the local Jewish population. Similar proposals came also from Odessa, where in some grammar schools the ratio of Jewish students reached 75 per cent. Advocates of the *numerus clausus* were also claiming that Jewish students joining the revolutionary movements had an undesirable influence on

⁷ Dubnow's material was published in *Evreiskaia starina*, 1909, pp. 88-90. The objective, unbiased analysis by Nikolai Leskov (1831-95) was published only in 1920 in St. Petersburg by Gessen. It was republished just before the regime change in Russia in 1990.

the other students. In the eight years between 1878 and 1886, the number of Jewish students attending institutions of higher education developed as follows (the second figure shows the number preceding the introduction of the *numerus clausus*):⁸

Table 1.

Jewish students attending institutions of higher education 1878 and in 1886.

Institution	Number of Jewish students	Number of students preceding the introduction of the <i>numerus clausus</i>
St. Petersburg University	42	268
Moscow University	33	298
University of Kharkov	28	414
University of Kazan	5	60
University of Novorossiysk (Odessa)	28	172
University of Kiev	76	237

By 1891, not only secondary and higher education but also bigger cities, primarily Moscow, had been purged from Jews. Only holders of wholesaler's patents and those with university diplomas were permitted to stay in the city. Jews were not allowed to become lawyers or civil servants, and with the sale of spirits becoming a state monopoly, part of the Jews in the countryside were forced to give up their livelihood; not being allowed to settle in the villages. They could not take up farming either, so the wave of emigration beginning almost immediately after the pogroms continued to spread.

The general atmosphere of the 1880s was determined not only by the ever more severe restrictive measures of the government, but also by the anti-Semitic hate-mongering emanating from the press with increasing intensity. Advocates of assimilation stopped dead in their tracks, and Russian-Jewish organs, especially in the pages of *Rassvet*, argued that the solution for Jews would be to melt into the peoples surrounding them, and the Jewish question in Russia was not specifically and narrowly a problem for Jews but an all-Russian problem.

One of most immediate responses to the pogroms was Leon Pinsker's *Self-emancipation. Appeal of a Russian Jew to the Sons of his People* (1882), a brochure published abroad and under a pseudonym. Pinsker had once been an editor of *Zion*, the first Jewish paper published in Odessa in Russian, but turned into an opponent of assimilation since then. He argues that Jews have

⁸ Gessen, t. 2, p. 230.

remained an alien element in every country, and the forms that the antipathy against them might take depends only on the level of education and culture of the given people. However, even legally recognized assimilation will not eliminate the separateness of Jewry, and nowhere were they accepted as equal to other citizens of the given country. The only solution for Jews therefore is to regard themselves as a nation again, strive to protect themselves legally, and have a state of their own, which is the only way they can accomplish all this. Pinsker did not have Palestine in mind at first but hoped for some colonial territory to be assigned for this purpose. It was only later, in the wake of the ideas of the religious reformer Moses Lilienblum, that the so-called "Palestinophile" movement developed, whose support was very narrow at the beginning. Still, this first appearance of what was later to become the Zionist movement clearly indicates the radical character of the change caused by the pogroms in the thinking of Jewish intelligentsia, a conspicuous sign of which is the complete turnaround due to failure by someone who had been one of the initiators of the former pro-assimilation trend.⁹

The extent of the changes brought by the series of pogroms in the history and intellectual life of Russian Jews is quite immeasurable. (That is the reason why I deal with these events and their aftermath at length in the introductory part to the next period.) The remaining possibilities are characterized in the literature largely by a choice between three alternate paths: "Zionism—Socialism—Emigration."¹⁰ In prose fiction, however, these choices are not separated so sharply into such clear-cut categories, but take on much subtler forms.

Zionism—Socialism—Emigration?

M. Lazarev's already mentioned paper about Russian-Jewish literature appeared in 1885 under the title *Contemporary Chronicle* in the review section of *Voskhod* (nos. 5–6, 1855). As I have pointed out, this means that for Lazarev, Russian-Jewish literature already represented a phenomenon which deserved an overview-type summary. Lazarev divides the Russian-Jewish works written thus far into two groups: tendentious works and *narodnik* "describers of everyday life" (*bytopisatel*). He measures the works reviewed against contemporary Russian literature, and notes that Jewish literature written in Russian fails

⁹ See also Herzberger, A. L.: *The Zionist Idea*, 1997.

¹⁰ Frankel, J.: *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917*, 1981.

to measure up to its standards, and is not genuine literature at all: there is too much discussion, whole treatises are inserted by the authors into the works, episodes are random, and all characters uniformly speak the same sterile Russian language. Structure, story and action all show the influence of contemporary Russian literature, the reason for which, in the case of the Narodnik writers, is not that they read too much Russian literature themselves, but that "the intellectual reality-portraitists writing about the suffering people are finding similar inner causes and parallels with the Russian authors."¹¹

According to Lazarev, the primary goal they have in mind is an ethnographic mission rather than literary creation. Russian-Jewish authors, in the split state of mind they are in, are unable to be objective; they are too partial, putting positive characters into the context of sentimental actions, moreover, they are constantly envisioning an imaginary hostile reader whom they continually want to convince, sometimes even of things that have nothing to do with the actual work. Lazarev wittily caricatures the general pattern of the prototypal Russian-Jewish novel, in which the young protagonists find themselves in conflict with their parents, then in amorous conflicts because of their dismissal of the traditions, while conducting theoretical debates on principles all the time. He makes the ironic comment that "if Russian grammar did not demand that the past tense of verbs have different gender endings, you would be utterly confused about whom the young protagonist is really talking to: his love or his friend, so elevated is the tone of the political debate that is going on about progress, the development of science and education."¹²

Lazarev is sorely missing a really good novel about the differences between the generations of fathers and sons (a subject which, according to him, was only partly solved by Levanda in *Turbulent Times*) and he also sees Yaro-shevsky's novel *Different Trends* (more about that later) as fitting into the same line. The Jewish Narodnik does not know what he wants to say, he only describes his observations and explains phenomena; he is not an artist, only a photographer, Lazarev suggests. He further divides Russian-Jewish writers into categories on the basis of who represent Jews in their own milieu (Rabinovich), and who in political and social life (Bogrov, Levanda), who are fond of their protagonists (Rabinovich) and who are not (Bogrov). Oddly enough, Lazarev does not so much as mention the pogroms and their effect on the literary process; all he observes is that the young and gifted Ben-Ami is a follower of the slogan "Back Home!" (that is, return to the Jewish community).

¹¹ *Voskhod* 5 (1885), p. 52.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

He also ranks Yaroshevsky's above-mentioned work here because he misunderstands the ending of the novel (see following chapter, p. 113.).

In Russian-Jewish literature, the tendency of turning back, the return of Jews to their own community and rediscovering the substance of Jewish life was indeed one of the potential responses to the pogroms. Ben-Ami was an original writer belonging to this trend, looking nostalgically into the past rather than into the future.

The desire to change Russian society and the Tsarist regime, the assumption that a radical transformation of these would lead to a state of affairs where Jews would also have a place in Russia, led later to the Socialist movements, but these became really influential only in the 1900s. For the time being it was the influence of a different movement, the Narodniks, which had great power. The Russian Jewish intelligentsia began to realize that the broadening of its own vision would be followed by the uplifting of the Jewish people, its education, and spreading knowledge about it. Variants of this Narodnik-inspired attitude is represented by the oeuvre of An-sky who, in exile, also experienced what a writer is worth outside his own community.

It was a typically artistic choice, and not a political one, when an author simply tried to describe or portray what he had experienced and seen, and left the search for answers to his readers. That was how the Russified Jewish intelligentsia was portrayed in Grigory Gurevich's work *Notes of an Apostate* (*Zapiski otshchepentsa*) published under the pen-name Gershon Badanes in 1884. He calls young pro-assimilation idealists "the victims of Russian literature" because what they had learned from Russian culture, from the works of Lermontov, Belinsky, Gleb Uspensky and Saltykov-Shchedrin, was respect for the universal ideals, for citizens' self-awareness, whereas after the pogroms they had to hear their Russian comrades, people with whom they had shared their enthusiasm for these authors, explain that they were "compelled to join the will of the Russian people" and accept the justness of attacking the Jews. "Describing" the life of Jews was also the goal of Naumov-Kogan and Yaroshevsky.

Mordekhai Ben-Ami (1854–1932)

Ben-Ami's life-work has become largely forgotten during the times. The contradiction to which this is due is inherent in his work itself: he gave expression to his nationalistic feelings about his Jewishness in his Russian language. His

only theme pursued throughout his life was the *shtetl*, a Jewish settlement halfway between small town and village, his own past and childhood memories, which he wrote about nostalgically—and in Russian. That was practically equal to excommunicating himself from the circle of the nationally committed intelligentsia the members of which were thinking similarly to him and, as a consequence, he is also completely inaccessible to today's Jewish readers (in Israel or in America), even though they might learn about a bygone and genuinely forgotten world from his works. Indeed, some scholars regard Ben-Ami as a predecessor of the "nostalgic" Jewish authors of the type of Isaac Bashevis Singer, Sholem Asch, Joseph Roth, Elias Canetti or Abraham Kahan.¹³ In his own time, sizeable parts of his texts, interspersed with Hebrew Biblical quotes, Yiddish words and Jewish proverbs, all transliterated in widely varying forms (with Hebrew, Roman or Cyrillic characters), must have been simply undecipherable to the few Russian readers who, perhaps, had a genuine interest in his work. An-sky noted in an article written in 1912 that "The tragedy of Ben-Ami does not only stem from the duality of artist and publicist, but also from the circumstance that he wrote for the masses but not in the language of the masses. He fought inside the enemy camp; that is why he remained lonely."¹⁴ That was how the odd coincidence came about that in 1912, as a part of the series of events staged in his honor, he was presented with Hebrew translations of his own works both in Geneva and St. Petersburg. Paradoxically, he may have been the most characteristic example that Russian Jews had chosen the route of assimilation: neither his Hebrew nor his Yiddish was good enough to enable him to write literary works in either language. He was, on the other hand, an enthusiastic admirer of Russian literature, primarily of Turgenev (until he wrote the story "*Zhid*"...). His literary efforts in Yiddish are mere translations or adaptations of works he published in Russian already. However, the pen-name he chose—"Son of my People"—mirrors his sense of national commitment. On one occasion he had used a different pseudonym, "Reish-Geluta" ("Leader—or Head—of the Diaspora"), but he probably shrunk back from the presumptuousness of that name.

In Ben-Ami's works, holidays and festivals play a central role, as is apparent from their very titles: *Chanukah*, *Tisha Beav in the Life of the Rednar Family*, *Purim*, *The Eve of Hashanah Rabo*, etc. Shabbat, the most important holiday keeping tradition alive, the lighting of the candles, is an almost in-

13 Salmon, L.: "Ben-Ami i ego mesto v russko-evreiskoi literature," *Istoriia i kul'tura—Evrei v Rossii*, St. Petersburg, 1995, p. 114.

14 An-sky, S.: "Prazdnovaniie iubileia Ben-Ami v Peterburge," *Rassvet* 12-3 (1912), p. 46.

dispensable requisite of his stories. He actually wrote two stories under the title *The Candles of Shabbat*, using the Russian diminutive for "Little Candles" in the version meant for children. In any case, the child for him is a special being carrying a divine spark, "the memory of the people," who salvages the traditions for tomorrow. With an exclamation full of pathos, Ben-Ami calls Saturday "Wondrous, Holy Shabbat!" "How I loved, how much I loved the Shabbat! It was only on that day that I felt human, free, independent, a man who recognizes only God as the authority above him. [...] I felt that with Saturday gone, my life was over too."¹⁵ The heroine of the story *Shabbat Candles*, who lost and left all that she had when she was forced to leave the *shtetl*, feels she cannot move on in life until she is not allowed to at least touch the candles of the Shabbat.

Ben Ami's chef d'oeuvre is the autobiographical novel *My Childhood* (1902–1905) and the series of stories connected to it bearing the title *Stories for my Children* (1906–1908). In the pages of *My Childhood*, the conflicts in the environment, between the muzhiks and the Jews, and the internal contradictions of some of the characters already make their appearance, which undoubtedly raises the value of the work. The author's stylistic carelessness, on the other hand, diminishes it, being much more apparent in a large-scale work than it would be in a short story. The mixing of Yiddish and Russian in the speech of the Jewish characters and the mirror translations only partially serve the creation of local color; as a whole they much rather give the impression of some kind of ambiguous stylistic experiment. (In Russian literature the fundamentals of the so-called *skaz* technique were being created in the works of Nikolai Leskov at about the same time.)

Ben-Ami's works provide sociologically precise information on the structure, rhythm of life, household, family and communal customs of the *shtetl*. Since, however, these are not portrayed by him either from the position of an intellectual "descending" to the people or from that of an analytical-minded, tradition-preserving folklorist, and the so-called social problems are equally alien to him, the main conflicts characteristic of his age are missing from his plots. His stories, virtually actionless, move slowly, are typically sentimental and are set strictly within the confines of the Jewish community. One of his finely structured, symbolical works, frequently and fondly referred to by recent researchers of his work as well as by his contemporaries, is *Baal-Tefilo* (1887). The story is told by a sixteen-year-old boy who, getting

¹⁵ *Knizhki Voskhoda* 8 (1904), pp. 40–1.

ready for the autumn Jewish holidays (New Year and Yom Kippur), sings in the synagogue choir with a cantor from the countryside. The cantor, a newcomer in the big city, visits the opera for the first time in his life, and falls in love with the female lead singer, or more precisely with her voice. Tortured by yearning, but even more by the shame and pangs of conscience he feels because of all this, he dies during the prayer closing Yom Kippur. This death can be understood in the knowledge, and within the frames of the Jewish world outlook. As Shaul Ginzburg points out,¹⁶ religious Jews are forbidden to listen to a female singing voice: they must not be exposed to such an erotic temptation, and since the "sin" is committed precisely at Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the punishment is "just." The gist of the story cannot be made sense of within a realistic portrayal, only allegorically, which, however, makes the tendentiousness of the narrative clear. At the same time, the power of the writer's talent is unmistakably present in the vivid, colorful representation of the big-city (probably Odessa) environment, the Jewish community already sensing the changing times, the family of the storyteller and, first and foremost, the character of the cantor "fallen into sin."¹⁷

Following the great change in Russia in 1917, Ben-Ami practically fell silent (he had actually stopped his literary activity in 1912), working only on his memoirs between 1909 and 1918. He was getting ready to move to Palestine but upon arriving there, he was disappointed because he was not received with the respect he thought was due to him. He watched perplexed that the building of the country did not rely on the religious traditions on which he had founded all his work as a writer.

Naumov-Kogan (1863–1893)

Naumov-Kogan is generally regarded as a one-book writer; he is recognized, if at all, by literary history only as the author of the long short story *In a Godforsaken Shtetl*, which he published in 1892. The story of the publication of his work is nothing if not illuminating. It was read by Vladimir Korolenko who proposed it for printing to Mikhail Stasiulevich, the editor of *Vestnik Evropy*. The original title was *Rebe Shloime. From the Life of a Godforsaken*

16 Ginzburg, Sh.: "Iz mira unizhennykh. Literaturnaia letopis'," *Voskhod* 7 (1898).

17 Markish, Sh.: "Russko-evreiskai literatura: predmet, podkhody, otsenky," *Novoie literaturnoe obozreniie* 5 (1995).

Shtetl. Stasiulevich gave it back, saying that he would be only ready to publish it under a different title, and he even asked the author to change his name, Naum Lvovich Kogan, to N. Naumov. Kogan reluctantly obeyed, which was how his work received its final title.¹⁸ The author became known as Naumov-Kogan due to the independent though posthumously appearing edition of 1894 in St. Petersburg. Chekhov also wrote about it in reply to a beginning writer who sent stories with Jewish subjects to him for an opinion. In the letter Chekhov praises Naumov for having not only a Jewish but a universally human message. "What use is it to write about Jews in such a way that it comes 'from Jewish life' and not simply 'from life'? Have you read the story 'In a Godforsaken Shtetl' by Naumov (Kogan)? It is also about Jews but it makes you feel that it is not something just 'from Jewish life' but 'from life' in general."¹⁹ Chekhov's words of appreciation do good service to the forgotten work and to the cause of the whole of the neglected Russian-Jewish literature, still, we have to take it with reservations. Kogan's work views the world expressly from a Jewish standpoint, stems from Jewish life, and Jewish life is also the primary subject of its portrayal.

Shloime, the protagonist of Naumov-Kogan's story *In a Godforsaken Shtetl*, fits to some extent in the line of eccentrics shown up by Rombro. It takes some time until a rational core and a view emerge of the full extent of his sad past and current persecution gradually out of his seemingly incoherent ramblings full of parables, Talmudic and Kabbalistic musings and interpretations. All the Jewish schoolmaster wants is to teach Jewish children in peace. Kogan's account of the almost animal fear of the Jew upon encountering the local authorities and, at the same time, his human superiority over them, is gripping. The faces of Shliomka are shown one by one in a sequence: frightened and humiliated when he is threatened by the police inspector on the street, he shows all the self-importance of the schoolmaster when he explains the significance of Jewish religious tradition to the story-teller: he believes faithlessness is nothing but ignorance, and secular literature is rubbish. The climax of the work, and also its centre, is the part set in the synagogue and the beginning and end—the "departure"—of Saturday. In this part, Shliomka is a central figure of the Jewish community, actually becoming exalted during his

18 *Vestnik Evropy* 11 (1892). *Vestnik Evropy* was one of the most influential liberal middle-class papers of the times, published in St. Petersburg. It was headed by Stasiulevich who published works by Turgenev, Goncharov and other major authors.

19 The letter was published after Chekhov's death. *Odesskii listok* 175/1 (1904). Quoted by Mikhailovsky, N.: *Sobraniie sochinenii*, t. 10, Spb. 1913, p. 100.

speech at the synagogue. In his interpretation of the Shabbat, Kogan follows the interpretation, frequent in Jewish literature, that on the Shabbat holiday, a Jew can at last feel human, master of his fate, whereas all other days of the week are spent in humiliation, at the mercy of others (see Heinrich Heine's already mentioned *Prinzessin Sabbat* in the section on Levanda p. 69). This description of the Shabbat also deserves comparison with that of Ben-Ami. Kogan also quotes from the prayers (in fact, he quotes the same metaphor, that of Bride Shabbat, as Babel would later in *Gedali*), weaves customs characteristic of Jewry almost imperceptibly into the story (e.g. the custom of admitting wandering beggars into the house), and his narrator makes almost literally the same exclamation as Ben-Ami: "Shabbat, oh, holy Shabbat!"). The poetic and ceremonial opening of the holiday, full of pathos, is followed by conversations in the synagogue: the Jews are gossiping and listen to tricky Talmudic legends. While rendering their banter, Kogan uses subtle means, at times mirror translations, to convey the fundamentally humorous verbal narrative style and anecdotal flavour of Yiddish speech.²⁰ The stories are humorous, philosophical and naïve all at the same time,²¹ and Shloime's Saturday

20 The author's regular, flawless Russian texts must be thought of as Yiddish, while faulty, phonetically distorted texts are meant to indicate Russian as spoken by Jews. (One typical example is the author's "translation" back and forth—from Russian to Russian—in the scene when the sick Shlioma is visited by the police inspector.)

A good example for the above-mentioned "Yiddish Russian" is the speech of the synagogue servant sent by Shlioma out for a book on a freezing cold winter day, who is reluctant to leave the heated room in such cold weather, and in the end asks to stay there for the night, since he has not seen a heated place for a long time: "That you'll be healthy here by me, and live for a 120 years! Oh, it's so marvellous in here! Have I not disturbed you? Well! You can tell me straight, no hesitation, no need to fuss, I'm a simple man among the little lords, when not, then it's not, I'll be running along, and be out of here fast as water flowing out, I have not danced with a bear! So what shall it be?" Naumov, N.: *V glukhom mestechke*, St. Petersburg, 1894, p. 57.

21 In one of the stories, a rabbi is sending a letter to another rabbi, and orders the messenger to deliver the letter immediately, even if his colleague is in the midst of a prayer. The messenger arrives, and the rabbi is, indeed, praying (ibid., p. 49):

"Without so much as a word, the messenger walks up to the rabbi, pokes him in the ribs, and hands the letter to him: 'From Rabbi Mendele'. At which the rabbi—well, would you believe?—opens the letter!"

"Right in the middle of the prayer?" comes an astonished cry.

"No, right in the middle of a party!" the storyteller said, irritated. "I thought you heard what I said. Have you got ears on you, or not? Well, the rabbi reads the letter, and falls to the ground, sobbing. The letter reads 'Mendele loves chicken.' There you are, chicken! Because what is really important here is not the chicken but some very profound thought which only the two of them understood."

The audience was deeply shaken, and thought hard about what the deeper meaning of that chicken could have been.

speech consists of Talmudic and Kabbalistic questions and exegeses. The storyteller loses the thread in the midst of highly involved explanations about the book of Isaiah, and represents the odd logic with a kind of subtle humor hinting at being outside. The pathos of descriptions in the other parts is made milder and more credible by the humor.

The synagogue chapter in the middle of the work has an arced structure: upon the setting in of the Shabbat, the Jews become beautified and ennobled to be worthier of the holiday, forget their troubles, but then, after the prayers, Shlioma's speech and the meditations, they are again saddened, think of their problems and worries, they are humbled and become target to ridicule. As a matter of fact, the entire story follows a similar arch in its composition: via the above-mentioned steps and moves, Shliomka rises to miraculous heights. We saw him first as a humiliated nobody, next he appeared as a conversation partner of equal rank, than taught the narrator a lesson from the elevated platform of the teacher, and finally we catch a glimpse of his exceptionality in the exalted synagogue speech. Following that climax, he rapidly declines, back to the starting-point: he falls ill, at the first visit of the narrator (once again in the role of the teacher) he lectures about the three elements of Jewishness.²² After that he is arrested sick, his pitiful, humiliated figure being marched along the frozen streets under a police escort. It does not matter that he is allowed to go home later, he dies anyway. Parallel with that, the faces of the police inspector also change. Kogan masterfully portrays the combination of coarseness and sentimentality, ruthless violence and profound religiousness inhabiting the contradictory "Russian Soul" all together. Lavrentii Ardalionovich is a very small wheel in the police hierarchy, but a veritable despot on the top of his little mud heap of a village. Sometimes he throws the narrator out shouting, next he invites him for supper in a letter; at times he is a cruel and soulless bureaucrat, at others, he is tormented by self-accusations. A turning point is the scene in which Shlioma, arrested sick, is being told that he would be deported. "God's finger" is all he replies (meaning this is the command of God). The police inspector is shaken by Shlioma's dignified behavior pointing beyond his physical misery. It is especially the mention of God that has so great an effect on him that he is virtually illuminated. He meditates all night, and recurrently ponders the sentence. It is as if he realized with a shock (or if he

²² What makes a Jew a Jew is prayer, atonement and charity. There are three words consisting of four letters each (also in Russian) corresponding to these concepts: voice, fasting and money. Of the Hebrew numerical values of the characters in these words, Shlioma deducts highly complicated relationships.

does not, then—fully in line with the intentions of the author—the reader certainly does) that there must be some kind of deeper relation or kinship between Shlioma's God and his own. This is a message which, elemental as it is, has not been driven home to its addressees up to this day.

Shlioma's last question is also related to this. Dying, he calls out to the inspector:

"Ask him what is it that God teaches?"

I became confused... the police inspector noticed it, and demanded firmly that I let him know what Shlioma was asking. Finally I did.

"You must love... Love every man and woman like yourself! You know that!" Lavrentii Ardelionovich answered.

I told the answer to Shlioma. His mouth fell open, his eyes became wide, as if he had been shocked, but then he thought, and smiled ironically... His eyes wandered around, falling on the inspector, on his wife, then on his bed, and he smiled ironically again... All the past and all the future were there in that smile... He sighed loud, then fell back on his pillow...²³

Kogan's hero does not answer. The author does not promote ideas or arguments, and does not intervene in his work. His characters are subtly shaded, tossed about between contradictions, and fully authentic. Lavrentii Ardelionovich, getting better and nobler, admits that for him, Jews always existed as violators of the law only, because he could not throw off the influence of his profession. That is why he became fundamentally "phobe" (that is, a "Judeophobe") by the very start. Despite the fact that he is genuinely moved by the death of Shlioma, he watches his funeral with disgust. "With you, Jews, even dying is repulsive. The body is dragged like an animal carcass, people run as if the march were driven by a whip."²⁴ Kogan ends his work highly effectively. Shlioma's funeral march is walking off; the sergeant enters, and reports loudly, in a Ukrainian peasant accent: "Everything is in order in Mikolaievka village. Good morning to you, Sir!"

Looked at today, what we find interesting in Kogan's prose is not primarily, or not only, the figure of the Jewish teacher, invaluable as it is from the viewpoint of its portrayal of the age. More than a hundred years later, overall prominence has been gained by the question as to whose eyes reflect events in this way, and what kind of narrative attitudes are hidden beneath the various

²³ Ibid., p. 82.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 83. Jews do not bury their dead in a coffin but wind them in a shroud. They hurry because the corpse should be buried less than 24 hours after death.

layers of the story. Kogan's storyteller is a young (twenty-five years old) assimilated Jewish intellectual, a man belonging to a different world in the eyes of Shlioma, who has never studied the Talmud, and neither prays nor observes the religious holidays. It is in the name of a universal humanism that he tries to help Shlioma rather than in that of common Jewish fate, and the help he offers is meant for the person rather than stemming from the general command of charity. His position between authority and traditional Jewry is precarious: he is not yet accepted by authority and no longer regarded as a co-religionist by the Jews. In Chapter 3 he is rejected by both at the end of a respective conversation. This tripartite character structure—the storyteller taking the middle ground between opposing parties—appears for the first time in Russian-Jewish literature, and anticipates the tension of Isaac Babel's *Gedali*, one of the masterpieces in *Red Cavalry*, a cycle of short stories, where the split position of the narrator is already irresolvable. Kogan's storyteller is perceptibly not identical with the author (a major step forward compared to, for instance, Osip Rabinovich's solutions like the first-person-singular narrator in *Refractory Soldier*). This young man, even if it remains unsaid, arrives as a follower of the Narodnik idea of return, or going to the people. However, he has no proposal for a solution; he does not know whether to defend the cause of Shloime, the passer-on of the old traditions, or to seek for new paths. His goodwill is as obvious as is his impotence. Kogan's ending of the story, the death of Shloime, is not only meant to arouse the reader's sympathy but also indicates this impotence. That ending, at the same time, is a warning sign of the passing of the old Jewish world.

Sergei Yaroshevsky (?-1907)

One has the impression as if Yaroshevsky²⁵ had been writing a single huge novel all through his life, in sequels. His entire oeuvre falls within the second period of Russian-Jewish literature. His first work appeared in print just when the pogroms were going on (although it had been written previously), and at the end of the second period, he fell silent.

²⁵ Yaroshevsky has no entry in the new Jewish encyclopaedia in Russian (10th volume, Jerusalem, 2001). In the old "classic" Jewish encyclopaedia, that of the Brockhaus-Efron edition (St. Petersburg, 1906–13) the entry in the 16th volume makes up 32 lines altogether.

The Pioneer (1882) exhibits all the characteristic solutions, basic situations and tools of his work as a novelist. In this book he employs one of the typical 19th century plots of Russian literature: for his main character he picks a young girl who wants to break deliberately out of the oppressive Jewish traditions. Esther's breaking out is not simply a love-inspired revolt against the traditional Jewish marriage plans of her parents, neither is its motive basically emotional in character. Esther is a self-respecting young girl who yearns for learning: "I want to be like everyone else, to be looked at like a human being, therefore I must know all that you know," she blurts out when she appears in the middle of the night on the doorstep of the young teacher of the local grammar school.²⁶ True, when she speaks of freedom, she points vaguely to the distance... While she is studying she faces the trap of an old-style Jewish marriage: with the help of the matchmaker, her parents find her a learned young man for a husband. Solomon Grimpelshpas arrives with his father for an introductory visit from the farthest, most self-enclosed Jewish province in the Pale of Settlement. Solomon's figure offers infinite possibilities for parody which the author leaves unexploited, choosing sorrow and empathic mercy in his critique instead. Solomon, puny and poor, his learning covering only the Talmud, is outside his village for the first time. He is as astonished by everything he sees as a child. His father presents Solomon's entire wardrobe, on which he spent most of the little money the family had spared, accurately naming each price. Not to be outdone in this lower-middle-class rivalry, Esther's family counters with putting every piece of the family silver on display upon receiving the guests, and instruct their daughter to sing something from an opera... The other world is represented beside Esther by the grammar school teacher in whose mouth Yaroshevsky puts all the stock phrases of assimilation, the object of so much desire, all that the Jewish intelligentsia would love to hear from its Russian counterpart. "Christ was a Jew and a Christian teacher... All men are equal, and everyone has an equal right to use all that nature provides. Your people is not outlawed. It has historic merits, and its mission has not yet been completed." According to Savitsky, Jews themselves bear part of the blame for their sufferings because they do not want to progress hand in hand with mankind. Esther's father remarks that the Russians were the ones who separated the Jews and locked them up in enclaves of their own, so mixing is now impossible, and Jews must walk their own way. "That was a long time ago; everything will be different now," Savit-

26 Yaroshevsky, S.: "Pionerka," *Voskhod* 3-9 (1882), p. 194.

sky retorts passionately,²⁷ and runs off to see Esther. The novel ends with their running away: they are speeding towards St. Petersburg on a train. The emancipation of the enlightened female character with a thirst for knowledge obviously symbolizes of the emancipation of the Jews.

Yaroshevsky's other novel, *In a Maelstrom* (1883), from which my book drew its title, and its antecedent, *Different Trends* (1882), attempt to give a panorama, similar to that of Levanda, of the potential paths before Jews, of the generations of fathers and sons. The time is the eighteen seventies. Doctor Vatman's nephew arrives in the small town, a representative of the generation brought up on the writings of Pisarev. "Pushkin, Belinsky and Lermontov did not exist for them any more. They read Bock's *Anatomy* and Foch's *Physiological Writings*, which was boring for 16-17 year olds, but at home in secret they wept over *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, only they told no one."²⁸ Young Adolph Vatman does not deny his Jewish "origin" but wishes to fight for the people because he is convinced everybody is equal. He takes a leading role in the student movement, and argues similarly to the Russian Savitsky in *The Pioneer*:

The blood of your Redeemer is flowing in my veins, and He taught that even real sinners must be forgiven.

There is no separate, specific Jewish medicine, and the more Jews turn into true natives, the more they give up their peculiar Jewish characteristics, the better they will achieve their historical goals.²⁹

"Mindful of the interests of the motherland and fighting for the good of the people," he joins the progressive movements in order to struggle for "a better society" alongside the Russians. According to Adolph, not only Jews are suffering, and the best solution for Jews is to stop being a nation, thus becoming able to join in the general trend (which is a reference to the title). It is not emancipation or political autonomy that should be fought for, but the young must be extended a general human education, and then the Jewish people will cease of itself painlessly.

The side opposed to Adolph's proposition is represented by Professor Rozenvald, nicknamed The Grim Cassandra because he sees the future of Jews in the darkest colors, who is fighting against the Russification of the Jews. "Even if we have no country, we are a people. The prisoner does not

27 "Pionerka," *Voskhod* 7-8 (1882), p. 197.

28 Yaroshevsky, S.: "Razniie techeniia," *Voskhod* 7-8 (1882), p. 197.

29 Ibid., p. 217.

stop being himself because he is in prison." Rozenvald does not believe in assimilation, and yearns for Palestine. Yaroshevsky tries to confront the opposing views with each other not only in arguments but also in genuine collisions. One of the stereotypical anti-Semitic accusations is that Jews are unfit for physical labor, and are generally characterized by physical weakness. The distance from "real" life and shyness—or self-confidence and cleverness—of Jewish characters is a kind of watershed where the protagonists of Jewish literature are concerned, and also a permanent topic right up to the works of Isaac Babel. (Kipen's horse trader, Yushkevich's Leon Drei, Sobol's farmer, Babel's Benya Krik are the "strong ones," but with these authors, too, tormented, uncertain, suffering literary characters full of inner struggle are much more frequent as well as more typical.) It is also with regard to physical prowess that young Vatman faces rejection by Russians. "Few of your kind can row a boat or shoot," his rival in love remarks offhandedly when leaving for a boat excursion. "We had been rowing for a long time when your kind was not even born," goes the clever retort, nevertheless Adolph, regardless of his faith in general humanism, is increasingly faced with the existence of the wall between "your kind" and "us." The other test is love, and so it remains also in the next works of Yaroshevsky. No matter how liberal the Russian family is, neither his former fellow-student, otherwise so proud of his radical views, nor the family advocating liberal opinions accept the young Jewish man as a family member, not only because that would put their reputation and careers at risk, but also because they have an aversion to him. Yaroshevsky, increasingly masterful at developing his plots (whether from the aspect of intensifying sentiments and shaping them into elevated dialogues or from that of the actual plotting of action), keeps a genuine political conspiracy, an illegal "action" in store for the end of the novel. A man sought by the police has to be hidden, and Adolph is ready to do so instead of his opportunistic friend. He is arrested, and Rozenfeld, who happens to be there, is also taken away along with him, although completely innocent. They are transported to St. Petersburg, and the novel ends with Vatman's uncle and his beloved, Lidia, traveling there to follow them. The sequel, *In a Maelstrom*, widens the social panorama, since when writing it, Yaroshevsky was already compelled to include the experience of the pogroms, being the first to do so in Russian-Jewish literature.

As the story continues, we see the committee making preparations for the production of documents on assimilation, which commissions local Jews to compile the papers, taking—or actually demanding—a bribe for it. When the money stops flowing, it immediately turns out that the small town is too close to the frontier, which means that the Jews cannot be granted rights

there. We see the Jewish merchant who fails at the elections, and we also see a young man, whose lovely bride goes out to watch the pogrom for fun, transforming himself from revolutionary to opportunist. The young man, on the other hand, comes to his sense for a moment upon seeing the pogrom, and tries to stop the raging mob. "This is a gentleman type, but I am sure he's a Jew too," shout the pogromists, whose only argument is violence, and Pavel gets injured. (We will find a practically identical scene in Kipen's work later on.) Ironically enough, the people of the town, believing what they want to believe, think that Pavel wanted to distinguish himself in the pogrom, and declare him a hero... In the meantime Vatman the elder is making efforts in vain to seek out influential people to ask their help to stop the pogroms, and for the restoration of the rule of law. After the pogroms the revolutionaries are also shocked to find that not even their own Russian comrades can see them as their equals, and they are as impotent themselves as all the others, unable to find a way to influence events. And the Jews stop trying to furnish the ground for assimilation; they are getting ready to move to Palestine instead, and are actually leaving at the end of the novel. Adolph, totally disillusioned, realizes that those departing are playing into the hands of the authorities. The "official" Russian view is explained to him by a police general before his release, who warns him not to entertain false illusions and chase daydreams, especially when he is a Jew. There is no such thing as a common cause. Any idea of that kind is a castle built of sand. "Intellectuals want to seem more Russian than the Russians themselves"—even though a Jew will always remain a Jew in the eyes of Russians.³⁰ Those leaving for Palestine are choosing the solution suggested to Vatman the elder by the gentleman of influence he saw in St. Petersburg: "All the roads are open before you... we will not be sorry to be left here."

The Jews getting ready to move to Palestine are shown more closely and in a much less favourable light in the next novel, *On the Road* (1855). The affluent Jewish classes are moving away from the traditions and are getting uncomfortably close to money. Polina, educated in an enlightened spirit, anticipates the type of the self-hating Jew: "I am a fierce enemy of Jewry. I look upon them as a stupid anachronism. All Jews are crazy because they enjoy rolling in a dirty pool."³¹ Polina is living in a marriage of convenience; her husband is trading in bills of exchange. The woman steals from him, deals in gems, making herself available now to young men, now to high-ranking offi-

30 Yaroshevsky, S.: "V vodovorote," *Voskhod* 10 (1883), p. 33.

31 Yaroshevsky, S.: "Na puti," *Voskhod* 1 (1885), p. 24.

cials for fun and for profit. Lawyers and doctors take positions in committees organizing the emigration of poor people to Palestine, but they have no intention to leave themselves, only to make use of the commission's money, until the President runs away with it. Polina is the opposite of her sister: the pure Bella is a self-respecting young girl yearning for action, a spiritual relative of the similar heroines of earlier books. Of course she falls in love with David who has recently returned to the small town. The amorous threads are shuffled and mixed up by Yaroshevsky to a great extent: this time the parents initially mean the lovers for each other in vain. Other amorous affairs intervene at first, then the "cause" itself: David goes to the countryside to till the land because in his view returning to nature is the road to a Jewish renewal. His future father-in-law is in disagreement with his new principles, and the engagement, cooling off, is cancelled. Beside the world of the rich Jews, we also get an insight into the poor quarters, and with David's eyes too, who sees Dirty Street (the equivalent will be named Moor Street in Aizman's *Flood of Blood*) as filthy inside out. A third medium is the village colony where Russians and Jews farm together. Beside financial difficulties, the number of conflicts is increasing too: the parents of the Jewish youths who have moved to the village are outraged because the young people do not keep the Shabbat, and are ready to take Sunday off instead, to avoid being the laughing stock of the peasants. Later on they also have their meals together with the Russian peasants, and one converts to Christianity so that he can marry a peasant girl. At this news, a huge fight breaks out in the village inn, in which David, trying to make peace, is being trodden on. At this point, Yaroshevsky breaks off his narrative, and neither sews up the love threads nor shows how David's fate develops later on. On the other hand, he conscientiously accounts for the lucky developments in the lives of the minor and major scoundrels. Thinking back to the title, these roads probably lead to an impasse.

Compared to Adolph Vatman's, David's Narodnik-inspired objectives involve moving away from the social struggle. Working the land, finding one's way back to nature is irreconcilable with the "fight for the political future of mankind" captivating Adolph and his friends. The way Yaroshevsky sees it, revolutionary hopes failed along with the collapse of assimilationist hopes. In the novels to follow, his protagonists are no longer interested in the redemption of society; they want to settle their own lives, but cannot even cope with that. (Revolutionary activity returns to Russian-Jewish literature after the 1890s, and its role must be spoken about when discussing Kipen and Aizman.)

The next novel, *Mezhpolye People*, is a huge family saga published in sequels by *Voskhod* through two years, the first installment appearing in the is-

sue (October 1891), which was the first to come out after the half-year ban ordered following the third warning by the Minister of the Interior. The first chapters provide an ethnographic panorama on traditional *shtetl* life. Indeed, the events introduced would fit perfectly into an ethnographic or sociological work: childbirth, illness, wedding, learning, holidays and the customs and beliefs related to all these, described in great detail. (Especially interesting is the author's precise account of cures and healing techniques employed for various sicknesses, described with a quiet, reserved, irony: the identification of evil spell, magic, quackery, the throwing of coal into water, washing with urine, calling a barber, the pulverizing of canine excrement, prayer, bloodletting, enema, plasters, medicinal herbs.) After the static genre pictures, we are shown the material rise of the Mezhepolye people, the place name turned into a family name.³² Events are rushing fast towards an unsettling conclusion. One of the brothers, after his Jewish wife died, can at long last marry his Russian beloved, and converts to Christianity for the sake of the marriage. But the formula "the lovers have each other" does not make for a happy ending. David and Vera return from abroad to find their house being set on fire during the pogrom. David rushes to the defense of the family with a pistol in his hand, but his mother is killed and her sister is almost beaten to death, at the sight of which his wife goes insane.

Yaroshevsky's last big novel, *Roza Maingold* (1897) treats the new familiar conflicts with subtler means, in a more tensely structured "chamber" variant set in a narrower space. We are faced with some finished facts already at the start of the novel. Young Alexander Blank has "brought down the wall": he converted to Christianity to fulfil his ambition and become a university professor, and returns home ten years later. His mother is a servant in the employ of the family which financed Alexander's studies, but she does not know about the conversion of her son. Blank, an ambitious and confident man, is greatly irritated by having to be grateful to the rich people for whom he feels nothing but contempt. In the rich family in the meantime his one-time pupil, Roza, has grown up, studied abroad and holds enlightened views. They duly fall in love, but cannot marry because Blank now has a different religion. Blank tries to ex-

32 In Russia, the registration and listing of Jewish names only began in 1845, and proceeded very slowly. Even at the beginning of the 20th century, there were still Jews who had no proper family name. One of the most frequent variants of Jewish name types was the place of origin turned into an adjective. On this, see also Gil', P.: "Evreiskaia geografiia i eio otra-zheniie v familii ashkenazskikh evreev," *Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve* 2 (1993), pp. 40-9.

plain that he has left a dead and emptied religion, but Roza accuses him of leaving one dead body for another: if he has exchanged religions, then his present religion is just as dead as the former was. "No, I have just changed clothes," Blank admits. "Jews think they have guardian angels behind their backs. I know all I have behind me is an endless, barren graveyard; that is why I never look back."³³ Love is the last link, the only force pulling him back, by which the author binds the apostate to his Jewish origin even after conversion.

Within Yaroshevsky's life-work, there could be no other path—that of a mixed marriage for example—left open to Blank, since the author never moved out of the Jewish environment in his works; he never portrayed the Russia that existed beyond the Pale of Settlement. The Russian characters are colourless episode figures, and in the chapters set in St. Petersburg, the city and its non-Jewish inhabitants never even appear (*In a Maelstrom*). All that we learn about Blank's university career and his environment is that he is given a chair. Blank is nothing but a piece of litmus paper in the life of the small town: here is a Christian convert³⁴ who has come back; let us see how everybody reacts. His mother does not even understand what it means that her son is "a scholar." "So is he a doctor, engineer or banker?" "No, a scholar." "Well, I don't believe that. He doesn't look like a rabbi," she says.³⁵ She only learns from the newspaper that her son has converted to Christianity, and falls ill at the news. This piece of uncomfortable and incomprehensible information is gradually slipping from her memory, and is mercifully relegated to oblivion. However, she is reminded by the careless, poor relatives who are rejected by the Jewish community as a consequence of Blank's conversion, and their daughter's engagement is also cancelled by the groom. The mother dies of shame in the end. She has her lethal attack just at the moment when events on the other, sentimental side, also reach their climax. Blank and Roza, following mutual confession of their love, fall into each other's arms, and Roza finally spells out that in her view, Blank committed his fatal error not when he abandoned the Jewish fate but when he took up a different religion. By doing so, he gave up his freedom, and, on the other hand, he lives in a lie because he does not believe in his new religion. In addition he also made their marriage impossible. Roza has already made up her mind, and while seemingly dutifully preparing for her wedding with another man, the

33 Yaroshevsky, S.: "Roza Maingold," *Voskhod* 8 (1897), p. 35.

34 The act of conversion is circumscribed by the author with euphemisms: "he had to bring down the wall that stood between him and his dream. And he brought it down". *Voskhod* 7 (1897), p. 25.

35 Ibid., p. 36.

Shakespearean ending is unfolding: Roza waves farewell from her window to Blank, then kills herself. Finding only the corpse, Blank lies down beside it and also commits suicide. The Jewish Romeo and Juliet never stood on opposite sides but were separated from each other by the fatal move of one of them having converted. Blank wanted to destroy a wall but raised another instead, propped up on the one side by tradition-respecting Jews and, supported on the other by Russian legal order.³⁶

Scenes at railways station or on trains are conspicuously characteristic of Yaroshevsky's beginnings and endings. That was how *The Pioneer* ended. So did *Different Trends*, and *In a Maelstrom* also ends with a similar scene: the Jews are leaving on a southbound train towards the ports and Palestine—"emigrants, Russian pioneers, who were leaving for a new home because the old one turned out to be a bad stepmother"—while Lida and Adolph are on their way to the West, probably to some European country where a Christian girl and a Jewish man are allowed to marry. (The ending was misunderstood by Lazarev: he thought Adolph and his girl were also leaving for Palestine, and he wrongly ranked Yaroshevsky's approach along with that of Ben-Ami, see p. 97.) At the end of *In a Maelstrom* and *Mezhpolye People*, published in 1883 and 1891–1893, respectively, love finally defeats the legal system prohibiting mixed marriages, which "creates artificial divisions between people by religion and nationality"³⁷ even though in the last mentioned book love is ultimately destroyed by the pogroms and the madness. At the end of his career, the author sees no way for a heroic breakout: Blank cannot and Roza does not want to break free from Jewishness. While in the earlier works, there were only trains leaving for the unknown, future fates remaining open (*On the Road*), in *Roza Maingold*, the paths of two generations is disrupted violently: that of the mother and that of the two brilliant, enlightened, strong-willed young people. The double suicide at the end expanded into a tragic, extraordinary parallel with the double suicide ending the author's own life (see his biography).

Yaroshevsky's oeuvre represents the first attempt to portray human lives without authorial declarations of opinion, by purely literary means. In these novels and stories the only positive or negative value judgments to be read are those viewed through the eyes of the characters. Of course, these works demand that the contemporary reader take a stand. Their character of confront-

36 On conversion in Russia, see Agursky, M.: "Conversions of Jews to Christianity in Russia," *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 20/2–3 (1990); Stanislawski, M.: "Jewish Apostasy in Russia: A Tentative Typology," in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. T. Endelmann, 1987.

37 Yaroshevsky, S.: "Vykhodtsy iz Mezhepolia," *Voskhod* 8 (1893), p. 67.

ing sets of values with each other is manifest in debates and prolonged dialogues which are not always well integrated in the action.

Yaroshevsky's forte is the development of the plot, the timing of events, intrigues, letters and encounters. Love is the primary motive force in all his novels, and he employs all the linguistic means of sentimental love scenes (when, for instance, a man asks for the opinion of a woman, it will be described as "the crying out of a soul yearning for peace").³⁸ The author wants first and foremost to influence the emotions of his readers, and once they have opened up, to compel them to think hard: they must take a stand and choose between polarized opinions and groups of characters, even when much more difficult problems are involved, which appear downright irresolvable. In his life-work, the author tried some of the most effective novel endings: rewarding, dissonantly, the evil characters, leaving the fate of the positive heroes open, sending the protagonists off to the unknown by train, happy and tragic endings for the lovers. He has no idealized heroes. Even if he cannot always create subtly shaded, thoroughly credible characters, they are never molded under the influence of prejudices derived from ideals. Yaroshevsky was a genuinely gifted writer but his talent could not really unfold. It is not impossible that the reason was in his own limited experience (little is known about his life, and not even his birth date is known). It seems that he only knew his own environment well enough, and restricted himself to its portrayal, thereby confining himself in a sense within walls.

38 Yaroshevsky, S.: "Roza Maingold," *Voskhod* 12 (1897), p. 9.

III. “AT A CROSSROADS”—CHOOSING PATHS

The third period of Russian-Jewish literature set in following an imperceptible transition, and is associated, if conditionally, with the date suggested by Shimon Markish: the year 1897 when the first Zionist Congress was held in Basel. This was also the year when Semyon Yushkevich's first work, *The Taylor*, was published in the Narodnik paper *Russkoie Bogatstvo*. The big names of this period already sound more familiar to Russian readers as valiant representatives of the second rank of writers. The apologetic period was over once and for all, and the didactic, tendentious approach was gradually pushed to the background. The post-pogrom generation, abandoning traditional Jewish life *en masse*, was facing new kinds of misery, and the lot of this wretched crowd was very similar to that of the masses of peasant-turned laborers, separated from their land, swelling the ranks of Russian proletarians and unemployed, and partly identical with it. In Russian-Jewish prose, the inheritors of the Narodnik trend also moved closer to the Russian authors sensitive to problems of this kind. Russian-Jewish writers were also writing about poverty, exploitation and revolution, revealing the poor, the exploited and exploiters among the Jews, as well as the revolutionaries. In fact, they revealed a little more of the revolutionaries than the others. The introduction to the volume *New Winds*, containing Jewish writings, observes that there are many Jews among the revolutionaries, and many of the revolutionaries are Jews. “We do not emphasize this in order to fan our national pride... We would like to believe that the revolution will show Russian society the true face of Jewry.”¹

It may be worth while to give some thought to how the turn-of-the-century portrayal of revolutionary and Socialist movements reads today. A historically

¹ Quoted by Gornfeld, A. G.: “Evreiskii sbornik,” *O russkikh pisateliakh*, t. 1, Minuvshii vek, Spb. 1912, p. 87.

correct attitude requires that these works be considered in their own place rather than in the knowledge of all that would come afterwards: Communism seizing power, turning into a state ideology, and collapsing in another seventy years. Every self-respecting intellectual took part in the political movements or parties opposed to the Tsarist regime as well as in the ongoing political debate. The Russian intelligentsia, true to its 19th century traditions, continued to move toward the people, and it found the directly accessible object of its movement in the urban proletarian class, which was within reach. Before that, the Narodniks had to travel to distant parts and give up their earlier lives to find the *narod*, “the people.” Even artists floating over the highest peaks of the Parnassus like Blok, Bely and Vyacheslav Ivanov were constantly struggling with this complex, and the motifs of “the people” and the revolution are a constant presence in their graceful, magic works built on strange philosophical systems and delving into mysteries and the skies. This does not in the least mean that they should all be seen as revolutionary writers (as some of them were compulsorily labelled during the Communist era). Quite to the contrary, what we have to see is that the mere mention of the revolutionary and political movements that were an integral part of the age cannot retroactively label or discredit the authors we are discussing in the eyes of today’s readers even in the knowledge of subsequent political developments.² One quote may be particularly well suited to explain what Marxism meant in contemporary Russia. The Acmeist poet Osip Mandelstam, a genuine emblem symbolizing high taste and aesthetic refinement in the 20th century and hardly a man to be accused of ideological bias, remembered the spiritual path-seeking of his young years in these words:

In general, the revolutionary rabble of the days of my youth, the innocent “periphery” seethed with novels. In 1905, boys went into the revolution with the same feelings as Nikolenka Rostov³ had on going to the Hussars: it was a question of love and honor. To both, life seemed impossible unless it were warmed by the glory of one’s age [...] For too long, the intelligentsia had been fed on student songs. Now it was nauseated by its universal questions. The same philosophy from a beer bottle! That was the vilest scum when compared to the world of the Erfurt Program, the Communist Manifesto, the agrarian debates. They had their own Protopoe Avvakum...

² On the part of Jews in revolutionary movements and the problem in general, see Vital, D.: *A People Apart. The Jews in Europe: 1789-1939*, 1999, pp. 400-14. Budnitskii, O. V.: “V chuzhomu piru pokhmelie. Evrei i russkaia revoliutsiia.” *Vestnik Evreiskogo Universiteta v Moskve*. No 3 (13) 1996.

³ A youthful hero in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*.

In the chapter "Erfurt Program," Mandelstam admits that even after having found *Das Kapital* indigestible, he still read about the socialist ideals with great enthusiasm. "But just imagine—for a person at a certain age and at a certain moment, Kautsky (I say Kautsky, of course, just as an example; and might with equal justice have said Marx, Plekhanov) is Tyutchev, that is, the source of cosmic joy, the bearer of a strong and harmonious attitude toward life, the thinking reed, and a cover thrown over the abyss."⁴

By the beginning of the next century, emigration had become an integral part of the life of Russian Jews. For three of the authors discussed in this chapter, being away from the land of their mother tongue for a shorter or longer time, or for good, played a major part in their life. The pogroms of 1903 and 1905 provided ultimate proof to all that Russia will never be a chosen, ultimate homeland for Jews. These were already quite openly so-called bloody pogroms (meaning that not only looting but also killing was involved) leading in some places, in Odessa for instance, to a state of siege lasting for years.⁵

It became increasingly clear that the majority, looking towards Palestine, were wishing to break away from Russia in the linguistic sense, too. The movement for the renewal of Hebrew was gaining strength, and several Hebrew language study circles were active also in Russia.⁶ It was the forging ahead and modernization of Yiddish that enabled the Chernovtsy Conference (1908) (investigated in detail in the introductory chapter) to declare that Yid-

4 Mandelstam, O.: *The Noise of Time and Other Prose Pieces*, 1986, pp. 108, 109. Or also in: *The Prose of Osip Mandelstam*, 1965. The closing sentence is an allusion to a poem by Tyutchev.

5 On the pogroms of 1905 and the contemporary Russian Right and anti-Semitism, beside the aforementioned historical books by Gessen and Dubnow, see also Weinberg, R.: "Workers, Pogroms and the 1905 Revolution in Odessa," in *Pogroms in Russian History*, 1987; Kagan, I.: *Pogromy v dni svobody (oktiabr 1905 goda)*, 1925; Kostomarov, G.: *Chornaia Sotnia pod flagom religii v 1905 godu*, 1931; Kozlov, V.: *Istoriia tragedii velikogo naroda*, 1996; Laqueur, W.: *A History of Zionism from the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel*, 1972; idem: *Black Hundreds. The Rise of Extreme Right in Russia*, 1993; Melberg, O.: *Rational Irrationality? Describing and Explaining the Extreme Right in Russia. Political Culture*, 1996; Roger, H.: "The Beilis Case. Anti-Semitism and Politics in the Reign of Nicolas II," *Slavic Review* 4 (1996); *Marxisten gegen Antisemitismus*, ed. I. Fetscher, 1974; Vital, D.: *A People Apart. The Jews in Europe: 1789-1939*, 1999, pp. 509-13, 566-93.

6 The first grammar-school class in Palestine whose graduates had studied exclusively in Hebrew won its diplomas in 1900. In 1914 a "language war" broke out at the Technical Academy of Haifa, where students demanded a changeover from German to Hebrew as the language of tuition.

dish was “a national language” of Jews. A rare curiosity: in 1906, an abbreviated Russian translation of the first issue of the paper *Der Jüdische Proletarier* was published, the motto of which was “Proletarians of the nations, unite!” The place of publication was Geneva.⁷ The words “*Falling Apart*” appeared in the title of a 1902 novel by Yushkevich. That was how Russian Jews felt about what was going on. While the previous period was still characterized by titles (beside those already mentioned) like *At a Crossroads* (a drama by Vladimir Bashkin [1855–1919] published in 1880) or *The Outsider*⁸ (Rasheli Khin [1864–1928], another drama from 1886), what followed now was disintegration, the parting of ways, and deterioration as finished facts, followed by the anticipation of deep troubles. The next titles—the likes of *Stifling Heat* (1900) by Miron Ryvkin (1869–1915), *The Old Ghetto* (1907) by Dmitry Tsenzor (1877–1947) or *Eternal Wanderers* (1904) by Aleksei Svirsky (1865–1942)—signify, among other things, that a new theme was emerging, the lifting of the world of outcasts, of “barefoot” people, up into literature (perhaps in the wake of the stories of Maxim Gorky, who had risen to world fame in the 1890s). Jewish youths frequently drifted into a marginal position; for some of them it was actually a chosen lifestyle. They were predestined for that not only by poverty but also by the fact that most of the usual upward routes of society were closed before them. As a matter of fact, much of the country was inaccessible to them even in a geographical sense as well as institutionally. Svirsky, who, in the first ten years of his literary career, did not write about Jewish themes (perhaps because he had converted at the age of seventeen, which, if correctly calculated, fell to 1882, the year of the great pogrom), began to provide news about the deepest recesses of Jewish poverty, about criminals and homeless street urchins.⁹

Organizations of Jewish culture

Although the general mood of disintegration indicated the presence of real problems, nevertheless, this period saw an unparalleled flourishing of Jewish culture. More than 60 regularly appearing Jewish periodicals were being published in the first decade of the 20th century. Jewish cultural societies, organi-

⁷ *Evreiskii Proletariat*, Zheneva, 1906.

⁸ This is only a makeshift translation of its highly apt Russian title, *Ne ko dvoru*, which is closer to “Misfit” or “Not One of Us”.

⁹ His works are *In Prisons and Hideouts* (1895), *Death Camp* (1911), *Eternal Wanderers* (1904), *The Red One* (1901–4).

zations, scientific bodies and critical schools grouping around certain magazines sprang up by the dozen. All major Jewish scholars without exception were writing for the general public, too. Of the authors of articles cited in this book, the historian Iulii Gessen, the essayists Shaul Ginzburg, Arkady Gornfeld and Sergei (Israil) Tsinberg as well as famous personalities like Simon Dubnow or Jabotinsky were all regular authors, organizers and editors of these papers. The chapter on An-sky will provide a better view of the intensity and devotion with which men of letters and scholars of the age threw themselves into the creation of a Jewish cultural life.

The formation of societies was made possible by a law passed as a consequence of the 1905 revolution, permitting the functioning of associations and societies. The Jewish Literary Society was founded in October 1908 in St. Petersburg, under the presidency of Simon Dubnow. Its purpose was to support literature created in all three languages of Jewry: Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian. In 1910 the society was dissolved by a ruling of the Tsarist government. The Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society was also established in 1908, and continued to function till 1929. Its history and its ethnographic expeditions investigating the traditions of Jewry will be discussed in detail in the chapter on An-sky. Its presidents were Maxim Vinaver (whose name is familiar from the autobiography of Marc Chagall¹⁰), then from 1918, Simon Dubnow, succeeded in 1921 by Lev Sternberg, whose successor from 1927 was Sergei (Ismail) Tsinberg. The Jewish Folk Music Society was founded in November 1908, collecting and supporting Jewish folk music until 1928. It was chaired until 1911 by the singer I. Tomars, followed by I. Knozorovsky, a composer. In 1916, another society was founded to support the arts in St. Petersburg, which was active for three years.¹¹

One of the outstanding intellectual products of the era was the 17-volume *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (1906–1913), frequently quoted in this book as a source of information, meant, according to its subtitle, as a “Summarization of Knowledge about Jewry and the Culture of its Past and Present,” but is in fact much more than that. The editors of the giant work, Lev Katsenelson, Simon Dubnow, David Gizburg and Avraam Harkavi invited the best scholars and experts of the times to write the entries of the summary, unsurpassed in scope and quality up to this day.

10 Chagall, M.: *My Life*, translated from the French by Dorothy Williams, 1965.

11 Evreiskoie obshchestvo pooshchreniia khudozhestv v Petrograde.

The “Jewish Academy,” a Jewish private university funded by David Ginzburg, bearing the name Courses in Oriental Studies, also opened in 1908. At the classes of the above-mentioned and other outstanding scholars, students learned New Hebrew, Aramaic, exegetics, Bible criticism, the history of the Jewish people and Jewish literature, the Mishna and the Talmud, the history of philosophy, Jewish legal history, German and French. The undergraduates of the school helped An-sky a great deal in his ethnographic collecting trip. The university was dissolved in 1916.

Semyon An-sky (1863–1920)

An article on the ethnographic work of An-sky had the highly appropriate but untranslatable title “From Narodnikism to the People,” that is, to *narod* (“From Populism to the People” may be closer to the pun intended, but also misleading). The more profound sense is provided by the dual meaning of the word “people”: starting out from the idea of raising the simple people or, as he understood it at the time, the workers and peasants, An-sky got as far as the study and preservation of Jewish popular (or in reality, national) consciousness. An-sky began to “go to the people” (the *Russian* people, i.e. the peasants) at the advice of the noted Russian Narodnik writer Gleb Uspensky (1843–1902) at the age of seventeen, and to write in a Narodnik spirit. His interest in folklore and popular culture also dates back to this time. (The miners’ songs and workers’ songs collected and recorded by An-sky were published by Uspensky in 1887.)¹²

From 1892 on, in emigration, his interest turned again toward Jewish themes. The Dreyfus Affair (1894–1906) may have had a part in this, as well the studies and research he did in the field of French and Russian folklore, and finally the pogroms breaking out in the southern areas of Russia in 1903–1905. In his last letter sent from emigration An-sky wrote to a friend that up to now the Jewish people had been tied together and tied up by the Talmud and Messianic national thinking, but this iron link must not be replaced now

¹² *Russkiiye vedomosti*, 23 April, 1889. The same in Uspensky’s collected works: *Polnoie sobranie sochinenii*, t. 12, 1952; and in the annex of the following article: Alekseeva, N.: “G. I. Uspenskii, russkaia narodnaia pesnia i eio sobirатели,” *Uchoniye zapiski LGU. Seria filologicheskikh nauk*, vyp. 12, Leningrad, 1949. No 122.

by another one, that of Palestinian Messianism and territorial principle.¹³ His forty-page essay "Jewish Folk Poetry" appeared in 1908, two years after his return home, in the first volume of the almanac *Perezhitoie*.¹⁴ Its main proposition is that in Jewish folk poetry, the elements and influence of the folklore of many surrounding peoples can be discovered, but all earthly and material things in them are spiritualized; the heroic element and physical power are all elevated into spiritual qualities: force is overcome by smart thinking, and the miraculous is defeated by the divine. At the very beginning of his paper, he issues an appeal: all forms of folk art, everything that bears the traces of old Jewish culture and lifestyle, must be collected and classified in an organized manner. "This cause, as a cultural and national task standing above parties, must unite the forces of the best and brightest of our people. It is high time to create a Jewish ethnography!"¹⁵ An-sky saw this not merely as a scholarly task, but was seeking ways to apply this culture to contemporary life, for "there is no surgeon who could transplant a different head and a different heart to replace ours," he wrote in a letter. In another, he explained to Byalik that he thought the material collected would turn out to be a rich storehouse of themes, motifs and forms, thus helping Jewish writers, poets and artists to identify more closely with their people. Moreover, An-sky's cherished idea was a rapprochement between Jewish intellectuals and the people holding on to their traditions.¹⁶ He called together an academic conference to discuss his initiatives in which the most eminent figures of Jewish culture could make themselves heard. Some urged research on topics they thought more important: anthropological investigations in order to define the Jewish "race" as well as demographic surveys; others questioned the direct impact of An-sky's plan on the grounds that the collection of Jewish folk tales was unlikely to result in fewer conversions to Christianity, and neither would it have any influence on the younger generations, which no longer knows either Hebrew or Yiddish. The choice of territories to be investigated was also questioned.

It was in the same spirit that, within the framework of EIEO (Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society—*Evreiskoe Istoricheskoe Etnograficheskoe Obshchestvo*), a society founded not much earlier, the ethnographic expedition

13 Lukin, B.: "Ot narodnichestva k narodu. S. A. An-skii—etnograf vostochno-evropeiskogo evreistva," *Istoriia i kultura. Evrei v Rossii*, St. Petersburg, 1995, p. 126.

14 Four volumes of this almanac dealing with the cultural and social history of Russian Jews were published between 1908 and 1913. They were edited by Samuil Ginzburg and Israil Tsingberg.

15 Quoted by Lukin, *ibid.*, p. 128.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

was launched with financial support from Baron Vladimir Ginzburg, to which An-sky wanted to devote the rest of his life. Simon Dubnow also took part in the collection of material. An-sky also set up photographic studios in two *shtetls*, Polonnoie and Starokonstantinovo, presenting the projected negatives of his photos in the framework of musical folklore performances. He called the projections “hazy images.”

The researches of 1912–1913 were summed up in a report also covering the next plans, naturally in the hope of future funds. The list of participants included the writer Sholem Asch, the poet Khaim Byalik, Samuil Vajsenberg, an anthropologist, the composer Joel Engel, and the painter Leonid Pasternak. The last named, the father of the writer Boris Pasternak, also painted a portrait of An-sky after the death of the latter in Berlin in 1923. And another connection to the geniuses of the age: Osip Mandelstam paints a vivid image of An-sky’s extraordinary character in his memoirs, *The Noise of Time*:

Semyon Akimych Ansky would drop out of sight occasionally on some Jewish business in Mogilyov then turn up again in Petersburg to spend the night beneath Shchedrin, though without the right to domicile. Semyon Akimych Ansky combined in himself a Jewish folklorist with Gleb Uspensky and Chekhov. In his single person he contained a thousand provincial rabbis, if one reckons by the amount of his advice and consolations conveyed in the guise of parables, anecdotes, and so on. All Semyon Akimych needed in life was a place to spend the night and strong tea. People ran after him to hear his stories. The Russian-Jewish folklore of Semyon Akimych flowed out like a thick stream of honey in marvellous unhurried stories. Semyon Akimych was not yet old but he had an aged grandfatherly appearance and was stooped over from the excess of Jewishness and Populism: governors, pogroms, human misfortunes, encounters, the most cunning patterns of public life in the improbable circumstances of the Minsk and Mogilyov satraps, etched as though with a fine engraving needle. Semyon Akimych preserved everything, remembered everything—a Gleb Uspensky out of the Talmud-Torah. Behind the modest tea table he sat with his gentle biblical gestures, his head inclined to one side, like the Jewish Apostle Peter at the Last Supper. In a house where everyone was knocking against the graven image of Mikhailovsky¹⁷ and crack the tough agrarian nut, Semyon Akimych gave the impression of a gentle Psyche afflicted with hemorrhoids.¹⁸

17 Mikhailovsky, Nikolai (1842–1904): *Narodnik* intellectual, editor of *Otechestvenniie Zapiski* and *Russkioe Bogatstvo*, two of the most influential periodicals of the age.

18 Mandelstam, O.: *The Noise of Time and Other Prose Pieces*, 1986, p. 107. Or also in: *The Prose of Osip Mandelstam*, 1965. The English translation does not follow the original Russian text exactly.

For the sake of continuing the research, An-sky compiled a questionnaire containing 173 items by the aid of which volunteers could also collect material, which provided additional help in planning the subsequent route of expedition cum collecting tour. In the summer of 1913, the group, fortified by a number of young people, set out to Volhynia. They recorded more than a thousand stories and legends and about the same number of songs, made photographs, and brought four hundred old objects to the museum along with twenty manuscripts from the 17th and 18th centuries. It should be added that this region, along with the neighbouring Galicia and Podolia, were the breeding ground of all kinds of Messianic and mystical beliefs, which provided fertile ground for folk arts; fine arts, for instance, as is evidenced by the popular motifs of the wall paintings of synagogues and the colorful decorative pictures of tombstones and *pinchasim* (Jewish community chronicles). One of these is seen on the cover of this book.

While the material was being classified and work on the first volume, *Man*, which was to deal with lifestyles was going on, in 1913 An-sky interrupted his work because of the Beilis Trial, to which he had already reacted as a full-blown folklorist in 1911 in the article "Blood Libel in Jewish Folk Poetry." Then he pointed out on the basis of medieval and modern legends that the only defense of Jews against absurd blood libels lay in miraculous tales, because they could not count on earthly justice.

The next forced break in his creative work came in 1915, due to the First World War, which brought devastation precisely to the western border areas which were inhabited by Jews, and from where forced deportations began already in 1914, the Jews being accused of treason and collaboration with the enemy. In 1915, after having published another ethnographic account,¹⁹ An-sky threw his energies into a new kind of work: he got involved in the protection of the interests of Jewish war refugees (in areas along the Western border). He gave account in his articles and reports not only of the bitter suffering of Jews but also of the senseless destruction Jewish architectural and cultural values (books and devotional objects).

In 1915, Baron Vladimir Ginzburg donated the collected ethnographic material (which was formally his property) to the Ethnographic Society, on condition that the objects be exhibited at a museum, and An-sky must be its

19 "Pis'mo v redaktsiiu. O rabotakh etnograficheskoi ekspeditsii," *Evreiskaia starina*, t. 8, 1915.

director.²⁰ The list of objects was sent to Palestine (in 1915!) to the Jewish Museum located there, “for the eventuality that a legal protective refuge for Jews would develop there.” The museum was opened with 994 exhibits in Petrograd, in the spring of 1917, but by September conditions in the city became so chaotic that there were fears of a pogrom, and An-sky wanted to move the museum to Moscow. Not everyone agreed, so the exhibits were temporarily placed in safety. In the spring of 1918, the People’s Commissariat for Jewish Affairs tried to get hold of the material of the museum. A resolution decreed that “the collection is the property of the Jewish people, and as such, comes under the authority and protection of the government of workers and peasants represented by the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs.” In April 1918 the museum was seized and closed down, but An-sky, who also lived there, took action, and the operation was cancelled. (A communiqué was printed in the newspapers, declaring that the news on the closing of the museum were “false rumors.”) The museum was reopened in June 1923, already after the death of An-sky, and was managed by the writer’s former collaborators. Its operation was finally brought to an end by the 1929 campaign against religions and churches, when it was alleged that “the collection, instead of anti-religious propaganda, is engaged in spreading chauvinist ideology.”

An-sky moved to Vilna in 1919, where he began a similar collecting work. After the pogrom in Vilna in April, he was forced to move again, this time to Warsaw, where he almost instantly founded the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society of Warsaw. He was killed by a heart attack the day after the inauguration.

An-sky also owed the basic motifs of his world-famous play, *The Dybbuk*, which he combined with others coming from the traditions of the Kabbala and Jewish mysticism, to his passion for ethnography. (Its is known that an operetta bearing the same title by I. Laitner was performed in 1882 in Kharkov by Yakov Adler’s touring theatre company, the other title of which was *The One Possessed by the Devil*.)²¹ The play which had an adventurous fate was written originally in Russian (as evidenced by an excerpt published in Russian in a journal in 1916) under the title *Between Two Worlds*. An-sky passed the manuscript to Stanislavsky, the legendary director of the Moscow

²⁰ On the documents, see *S. Ansky (1863-1920) His Life and Works: Exhibition Catalog*, 1980.

²¹ Binevich, E. M.: *Nachalo evreiskogo teatra v Rossii* (preprint), 1994, p. 9.

Art Theatre, who returned it to him with the advice that he should translate it to Yiddish and give it to a Jewish company. An-sky did so, and gave the Yiddish variant to the Vilna Jewish troupe which, after a period of consideration, decided not to produce it after all. This particular Yiddish variant was lost when An-sky left Russia, and he had to re-write the play on the basis of a Hebrew translation made by Byalik in 1918. An-sky did not live to see his play being performed on the stage: he died in 1920. A professional text analysis of the play became possible only recently, because the original text emerged from the shelves of the St. Petersburg Library of Theatrical Studies in 2001 only, in two entirely different Russian variants.²² A chapter published in a periodical had been discovered by Shimon Markish earlier in a Tel Aviv library.²³

The plot of the play is an odd Jewish Romeo and Juliet story with the difference that, instead of hostile families, the young lovers are separated from each other by typically Jewish conflicts of a very different kind. The avaricious father once promised his daughter to the son of his friend, but as the children grow up, chooses a richer suitor instead, foregoing his promise. However, the young man, penniless and already orphaned, coming from afar, meets the girl he knows was once intended for him, and they fall in love. The boy tries to convert his passion into profoundly mystical, kabbalistic studies. When he

22 Petrovsky-Shtern, Y.: "Russkii Dybuk: obrazy i perevoploshchennia. Predisloviie k publikatsii," *Yehupets* 10, pp. 167–83. On the history of the play, see Werses, Sh.: *Between Two Worlds* (The Dybbuk). *Studies in Yiddish Literature and Folklore*, 1986. At the news of An-sky's death the Vilna theatre troupe prepared a production of the play as a tribute to An-sky during the 30-day period of mourning after his death and it opened at long last at the Elysium Theatre when the mourning was over. The company itself was taken by surprise at its unexpected success, and the premiere was followed by several repeat performances. A year later the play was already being performed in New York, and a couple of months later (in Hebrew) also by the Habima troupe in Moscow, directed by Yevgeny Vakhtangov, a disciple of Stanislavsky. The 600th performance was celebrated in 1928. In the 1920s it was a matter of pure chance that the Russian-Jewish work did not exist and function simultaneously in all three of its "mother tongues." However, the third language, Russian, was already missing. The first movie version of *The Dybbuk* was shot in 1938 in Poland, and the next one in 1968 in Israel. In 1960–1961 a television version was directed in the USA by Sydney Lumet. The basis of the musical adaptation of *The Dybbuk* was provided by the Hassidic song *Mipnei mai* ("Oh, Why?"), the main motif of the play. The music was composed by Joel Engel (Berdysansk, 1868 – Tel Aviv, 1927), who had participated in the ethnographic expedition along with An-sky. Since then, parallelly with many presentations on stage two operas, four ballets and a musical suite were made from, or rather on the basis of *The Dybbuk*.

23 *Evreiskaia Zhizn'* 1 (1916) [3 January]. See: Markish, Sh.: (text 56–60, commentary 60–1) *Evreiskii Zhurnal* 2 (1991, Munich).

dies, his soul takes over the body of the girl, uniting with her in this way. The girl thus possessed by the *Dybbuk*, the evil spirit, is taken to a wise rabbi, Sender, who tries to cure her and to do justice. The characters are one-dimensional like in a fairy-tale, the clashes involve generally human and, at the same time, specifically Jewish conflicts and pairs of antitheses (rich and poor, physical and spiritual, law and individual will, divine and human will, arranged marriage and love, teaching of the law and personal search, etc.) which may be turned into or raised to the level of allegories or even symbols, providing thereby a wealth of opportunity for theatre directors to develop artistic forms. Of two surviving versions, one focuses on the romantic passion the two young people, the idea of "improvement" (*Tikkun*) of the Kabbala and the legendary elements, while the other develops the conflicts from the attitude of the father, and especially from the faith of the old rabbi and the Judaistic idea of "complying with the task" (*Teshuva*).

An-sky, however, was fundamentally a prose writer. His literary career began in a peculiar way. His first prose work, *The Story of a Family*, was enthusiastically praised by M. Lazarev in 1885 in an article already mentioned in these pages. Lazarev, however, had no idea at the time who the author was: the work bore the signature "Pseudonym" when it appeared, since the story, written originally in Yiddish, for which An-sky could not find a publisher, had been translated into Russian and published by someone without the author's knowledge. The story tells about extreme misery, the ultimate falling behind of the poor Jewish strata, in a sharply pointed form. The sociological panorama of the three generations produces its horrifying diagnosis out of the sum total of minor misfortunes. In his poverty, a Jew takes a job as a navvy, and is buried by collapsing earth. The family receives no compensation from the "capitalist" Jew, so the widow has to earn a living as a wet nurse, while her own child is practically wasted and, growing up, becomes a thief. The widow's sister becomes a maid and, as is subtly hinted at by An-sky, is raped by her landlord. Her path leads to prostitution, pregnancy and giving birth to an illegitimate child, a *mamzer*, a great shame among Jews. The luckiest of the three sisters gets married, but is ostracized by the family because her husband wears European clothes and shaves, which is "the first step toward conversion." An-sky's novel makes no effort to convey any particular tendency or lesson to the reader. His footnotes, bearing all the marks of his meticulous sociological approach and his positivist penchant for collecting facts, do not only provide explanations of the Yiddish words and Jewish customs, but cover many other things like, for instance, the nature of the four kinds

of porters (the ways the work is done by the castes of "the masters," "the chosen ones," "the plebeians" and "the pariahs" among them).²⁴

From the distance of emigration, An-sky's interests were taken up on the one hand by the traditional lifestyle, that of patriarchal Jewry (*Mendel Turk*—1892; *In a Petty-Bourgeois Family*—1896; *Msirat-Nefesh*—1904), and, on the other, by the outcast or half-way position of the young generation, already broken away from Jewry but still outside Russian culture (*The First of Her Kind*,²⁵ and *Destroyers of Dividing Walls*, which later appeared jointly under the shared title *Pioneers*—1904–1905). The protagonist is a poor young man who returns to the *shtetl* in the hope of making a living from teaching lessons. He wants to teach Russian, or *pacher*, a slang term which, as An-sky explains, comes from the Russified Latin word *pater*. A typical piece dealing with the same theme is *Hunger* (1892) whose young intellectual hero feels that his Jewishness is not a primary factor in his life, and for him, Jews and Russians are the same. "I never concealed my Jewishness, yet whenever someone reminded me of it, I would blush nervously, as if I were embarrassed,"²⁶ he explains. When his life takes a bad turn, and he is tormented by hunger, he suddenly feels the memories of childhood coming back to him; recalling the warmth of the family, the *cheder* and the synagogue, he realizes with a shock how lonely he is. "All my present friends... seemed strangers in comparison; they were as remote and superfluous to me as I was to them... I suffered from hunger pangs in my stomach, but my soul was starved too, and aching for love and affection, for the tenderness of home."²⁷ The didactic happy ending is a dream coming true: the young man recovers from the illness caused by hunger to find his aunt who has been taking care of him by his bedside, together with his (Russian) friends coming to visit. He feels embarrassed; ashamed for his aunt who speaks flawed ("Jewish") Russian, but his worries turn out to be unfounded. The aunt is not only accepted by his friends, but is regarded as a great lady.

In *New Stream* (1906), An-sky portrays two generations side by side in a Lithuanian town. The young are all active in revolutionary groups and parties, organize the Bund, demonstrate, argue, and even the children are playing party and political games: *Bund* or *Eser*. Following the 1905 revolution the

24 Pseudonym (An-sky, S.): "Istoriia odnogo semeistva," *Voskhod* 39 (1884).

25 *Pervaya lastochka*.

26 Ansky, S.: *The Dybbuk and Other Writings*, edited and with an introduction by David G. Roskies, trans. Golda Werman, 2002, p. 84.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

main issue for the Jewry is the pogrom, which even changes the relationship between fathers and sons. The old man copying holy texts (a guardian of traditions also by his occupation) looks at professional revolutionaries like his son from a different angle once he learns that during the Gomel pogrom, it was the Jewish self-defense groups, the young people mocked as godless and unbelievers, who tried to defend the synagogue from destruction, and were killed right there on the threshold. Action and writing, the slow, steady copying of holy documents and the rapidity of heroic death from one moment to the next both counterpoint each other and are set side by side, since the youths had been trying to protect the very Torah scrolls which the old man had copied all his life. As portrayed by An-sky, the old generation understands the young ones. The coinciding of the intentions of the two generations is probably meant to convey the ideology of a much-desired national unity. In reality the growing revolutionary activity of the young Jewish generation did not at all meet with the approval of religious Orthodox Russian Jews sticking to their traditions, who were much rather worried by these organizations. Jewish philosophy was built upon, and taught, passivity and inward-turning; physical fighting in their eyes was almost equal to atheism, and the organization of the young in parties even more so, since abandoning the religion was practically a precondition to the latter.

In the story entitled *The Book* (1910), a short, somewhat didactic piece whose story-teller is the author himself, An-sky tells about the reason why he writes: "...I wanted to put into words what my *profession de foi*²⁸ is. All that kept Jewry together before—religion, the Torah, the Talmud—is gone, collapsed. And we, the representatives of the new Jewry, are trying to produce something which could, beside religion and outside religion, forge unity among the people. Well, that is what I am writing about." That is An-sky's way of expressing that a free thinker can still remain a Jew. And he also shows up two types, the proud, first-generation assimilated Jew, a patriot "more German than the Germans" (his sisters also converted), and the old father, left to himself, clinging to his books instead of life and a family, an obsessed advocate of the renovation of Jewry by the help of traditions. Another story, *Fedka* (1810), already portrays the typical character of the self-denying or self-hating anti-Semitic Jew, whose genealogy in Russian-Jewish literature may be traced back to Bogrov, but whose figure will attain true significance and a topical meaning in the later years of the 20th century. However, as soon as we say the

28 *Profession de foi* = "confession of faith, creed" (French).

word "topical," the charge of tendentiousness and overemphasized ideological message may be raised with some justice, and indeed, An-sky's stories usually have simple, sometimes didactic messages that can be summed up very easily. That may be the reason why they give the impression of being even more old-fashioned than the works of some of his predecessors.

His Jewish legends written in Russian strike an entirely different tone. A work he dedicated to Fyodor Sologub, subtitled "From Jewish Folk Motifs," bears a title which itself is highly stylized: *Tower in Rome. Fearsome and Wonderful Story of an Enchanted Tower with Four Gates, of an Iron Crown, of Blades of Grass that did not Wither, and of Emperor Nero* (1918). Aleksei Remizov's *Limonar* (1907), a work built on old Russian legends, was the first to use the material and idiom of folk poetry for the creation of a work of its own, the genre of which was defined by Boris Eikhenbaum as "folklore stylization." The avant-garde used it as one of the chief elements of ornamental prose, taken over partly from symbolism, but reshaped it according to its own taste (like Boris Pilnyak in *The Naked Year* [1921], but avant-garde authors also created joking stylizations playing on folk genres—see Zamyatin's tales and miraculous stories written between 1916 and 1924, such as *Miracles. On How the Brother Erasmus was Cured* [1920]).

The romantic, eventful story of An-sky's legend is all about the different nature and moral superiority of the Jewish people: unlike the masters of the world, they want no power, only wait for the Messiah; and want no battle, only peace; and their people survive because they are able to unite. In the eternally locked tower,²⁹ behind the first gate, the emperor finds an iron crown drifting in a pool of blood, which can be reached only over the dead bodies of those aspiring to power who drowned in the pool. Behind the second gate, Jews are praying day after day. In the third, there are blades of grass lying in bundles, all uprooted, but nevertheless bright green and fragrant. In the chamber behind the fourth door the emperor is celebrated in a red marble palace by a large crowd, which is to murder him once the banquet is over. The mystery of the images seen is solved by an old magician and stargazer who, before he dies, reveals the last secret of why the torn blades of grass symboliz-

29 The closed gates of the tower are ritually padlocked by every newly elected and crowned emperor. Nero, however, has the locks broken, and is rushing to his death. The opening of the secret gates, the unlocking of mysteries is a motif the universal symbolism of which would merit an investigation of its own. From the same era, Béla Balázs's mystery play, *Bluebeard's Castle* (1911), also combining folklore and philosophy—which was made world famous by Béla Bartók's magnificent music—offers itself for comparison.

ing the spirits of the Jews, by the uprooting of which the emperor wanted to magically annihilate the Jewish people, would not dry out. Only they, the Jews refused to fight for power, and their bodies are therefore missing from the bloody pool, which remains unfilled. Stepping on them, Nero would have reached the bloody crown symbolizing power over the world. "The blades of grass did not lose their greenness and succulence because they were bound together in bundles... If Emperor Nero had scattered them one by one..."³⁰ The explicit "moral lesson", which is much more suited to the genre of the legend than to An-sky's short stories, is present in all four smaller sections (the themes of which is referred to by the quaintly anticipatory title). In the most poetic and metaphorical part, a wall and a dome emerge out of the prayer of the Jews, the walls are filled with light, the dome opens and the Messiah appears, then withdraws because his time has not yet come, and the temple is covered by darkness. The scene, repeated at every evening prayer, condenses the creative power of the word, and especially the communal, sacral word, into a transcendent symbol of temple-building toward the sky. This imagery, similarly to the mystery-revealing, hallucinatory, allegorical character of the whole legend, is connected to Russian symbolic prose.

An-sky's literary works, grown out of folklore or nourished by it, are especially interesting to look at from the viewpoint of the cult of the East which appeared in the arts mainly after the turn of the century. This new vision of the East no longer took for granted the traditional 19th century Russian view, especially its political content, according to which the East-West dichotomy was nothing but a problem of social evolution, and "the East" was synonymous with Asia and Tartar-Mongol backwardness involving raw violence and an idealized freedom of instincts. Instead of that, artists emphasized the unity of East and West, the fertilizing power of oriental philosophy and way of thinking, the richness of ordinary-day life, and the philosophical attitude of the acceptance of the major events of life as natural phenomena. Although there are no common features as far literary forms are concerned, from the aspect of the history of ideas we may nevertheless refer to Martin Buber's Hassidic stories whose author mirrored modernity through Jewish folklore stemming from traditional, geographically and culturally isolated Hassidic philosophy.³¹ The approach of Buber's stories was a major discovery for the

30 Ansky, S.: *The Dybbuk and Other Writings*, 2002, p. 166.

31 Buber, M.: *Mein Weg zum Chassidismus*, 1918.

age, and it had a fundamental validity for Buber's own philosophical system. Its spiritual influence on assimilated Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers of the era is hard to overestimate.

The huge potentials inherent in Jewish folklore were also exploited by Isaac Babel in some works, as will be shown in the chapter devoted to him later on. Ilya Ehrenburg also made an attempt to adopt the traditions in *Lasik Roitschwantz* (1928), widely regarded as a Jewish novel. However, we know from his own memoirs how unfamiliar the theme was to him: he heard the Hassidic legend³² appended to the novel in Paris in the Café Rotonde.³³

An-sky treats and develops the Jewish legends and folk motifs in a manner similar to Buber's. In these works the possibility of an organic Jewish literary genre looms up in which the ancient (Oriental) pictorial thinking inherent in the specifically Jewish tradition is employed by the author in such a way that it fits artistically into universal modern literature.

Aleksandr Kipen (1870–1938)

Kipen was regarded as a second-rank writer even by his contemporaries. A member of the *Znaniie* circle, he was characterized as a describer of everyday life (*bytopisatel'*) with "an undoubted, if not too great, talent." His greatest merit, according to critics, lay in a self-imposed "restraint": he never aimed for more than he could achieve: "he takes a small, strange section of the small world which he knows well, and through that he sees the whole wide world, which he is also able to show to the reader."³⁴ Kipen was really one of the authors who, similarly to Yaroshevsky, or even more so, refrain from inserting themselves into their works. He attempted to express his thoughts through little segments of reality, through close-ups, and his Narodnik and Socialist leanings also pushed him towards the factual portrayal and the exposure of reality. He was Yaroshevsky's direct successor also in that the first event

32 Ehrenburg, I.: *Burnaia zhizn' Lazika Roitshvanetsa*. 1929. See also: Lazik Rojts'vanec. Nachdruck der Ausgabe Berlin 1929. Centrifuga – Russian Reprintings and Printings. 1974. Chapter 40.

33 Ehrenburg, I.: *Liudi, gody, zhizn'*, 1990, p. 456.

34 Gornfeld, A.: "Odinnadtsatyi sbornik Znan'ia" *O russkikh pisatel'akh*, t. 1, Minuvshii vek, Spb. 1912, p. 67.

which he was compelled to describe was the pogrom; in his case the pogrom that followed the 1905 Odessa uprising.

In October (1905), published in 1906, in which the date between parentheses is also a part of the title, indicated factualness by its very title, since it contains nothing but a bare date. Kipen portrays many kinds of heroes, appearing first in the turmoil of the workers movement, at strikes, meetings and debates, only to “take the test” about the unity of words and actions during the pogroms. A Victor Hugo-style revolutionary romanticism unfolds in the rapid succession of events taking place on the barricades—or “ballicards” in the child’s language of the Odessa successor to Hugo’s Gavroche—made cinematic by the author in curtailed, elliptic sentences and rapid-fire dialogues. Similarly to Hugo’s novel “*Les Misérables*,” the child dies in Kipen’s work, too, along with a revolutionary trying to protect the Jews, and their funeral presents another opportunity for demonstrations, speeches and clashes with the police. *In October (1905)* does not concentrate only on the pogroms as its main theme; anti-Semitic riots (true to the actual chronology of events) break out only after the strike and the uprising, in the second half of the story.

The beginning of the pogrom, the relentless, false and deceitful logic of its development and the manipulations of the authorities are portrayed laconically, reduced practically to the bare essentials of a universal formula. The significance of it all is that pogroms in the 19th century usually broke out around Easter, and were marked by religious intolerance. The prolonged series of pogroms of 1881–1882, however, introduced a new scenario, a product of modern anti-Semitism (see the introductory part of the previous chapter). Rumors spread during the uprising that the revolution was being “done” by the Jews because they want a republic, a “Jewish Tsardom,” so “our master the Tsar” and the motherland, where they are intruders anyway, must be defended from them. It followed “logically,” that—as rumor confirmed it too—the police received secret orders not intervene in defense of the Jews. Everyone could see that the Jews tore up the image of the Tsar, could they not? (In Kipen’s narrative, the police chief carries a previously torn picture of the Tsar all over town, as an icon.) The official version is that there is no pogrom at all; all people do is protect their city from the Jews.

In Kipen’s story, only the cowards survive (much similarly to Yarochevsky’s solution who rewards only the basest ones with a happy ending). One of the survivors is Litiagin, a *déclassé* nobleman sympathetic to the socialists, and so is the converted Jew David Fast, who supports the revolutionaries in principle, but when he is threatened by the rioters, he is ready to say anything that they want to hear. On the other hand, the student leader dies,

who, despite being a Russian, defends ordinary Jewish people, the same ordinary people who blame the revolutionaries for the troubles: "You wanted freedom? So now you have it!"³⁵ Not only Jewish men-in-the-street are hostile to the revolutionaries hurrying to their defense, but also religious Jews, who have no trust in Russians and Jews being able to stand on the same side at all, no matter what is concerned.

The central character is Naidich, an assimilated Jewish intellectual in whom doubts awaken by the effect of the pogroms, and he gradually returns to the Jews. Naidich is in a very close kinship with Yaroshevsky's young hero, Adolph Vatman:

Naidich was deeply depressed by these groans, which echoed in his mind as bitter accusations. He did not know his people, the Jews very well, and did not like them too much either. And now they had put on the thorny crown of martyrdom again, dying as redeeming victims, fulfilling their fate... But why? It cannot be that this is being done by the same Russian people for whom he would have given his life gladly! Nonsense! Impossible!³⁶

And he instantly sees himself dying trampled, bleeding, just as it would happen later. Naidich is contrasted by the author with Fast, the converted Jew. They are seemingly in the same position. Both abandoned the Jewish fate, and at the beginning of the story their views agree on everything. The pogrom would be the watershed between them, because the way Kipen shows it, for intellectuals (who did not convert) there is still a way back to Jewry, if not to the religion, at least to the people. This return is portrayed symbolically by the scene in which Naidich, with a white kerchief in his hand, crosses the line of the Cossacks, and goes over to the other side where the Jews are being beaten (Part II, Chapter IV). Before that, he gets into a heated argument with Fast; that is when he understands that those who converted have left for ever. Fast makes the sign of the cross and curses the Jews readily when his carriage is stopped by the pogromists.

Kipen's commitment as Jew is indicated by the pathos of a prayer house scene, which strikes a different note, although progressing as intensely as the whole of the narrative, and its pathos is to be found not in authorial remarks, but in the way the scene is built up. The peasants carrying out the pogrom

35 Kipen, A.: "V Okt'abre," *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1928, p. 96.

36 Ibid., p. 97.

break into a house of prayer but are taken aback by the sight of the praying rabbi:

"He is praying," it was heard.
 "That must be the rabi himself..."
 "Look at that! There's a Jewess too... sitting on the floor..."
 "Well everybody has their own laws..."
 "True enough... Leave them alone... Let's go, lads..."
 "Let him pray... He can go to hell..."³⁷

The scene has multiple meanings. Kipen emphasizes that when not incited to violence, ordinary men and women do not see people of a different religion as enemies. It is also obvious that for this reason the genuine motive of the peasants and lower middle class people setting out to take part in a pogrom is not religious intolerance or ethnic hostility but the freedom of robbery, the authorization of looting, which means that those who incited them were exploiting economic and social tensions.

The message of Kipen's pathos is found most likely in the suggestion that the self-confidence, pride and dignity of the religious Jew provides strength and moral integrity, and this is what keeps Jewry alive in a literal sense. *At a Crossroads* (1910)—in which the pogrom is being represented from the other side, that of the army troops standing idly by—ends on the same note. The moral superiority of the old rabbi dressed in ragged clothes lends him a kind of physical invulnerability, by the help of which the extraordinary figure crosses the rows of policemen and pogrom bandits as if he were parting the Red Sea. It is as if Kipen had listened to Gornfeld's criticism, who admitted in the above cited article that Kipen's work was the best among those trying to portray the pogrom; his episodes were lifelike and important from the viewpoint of a general picture. At the same time, he reproached the writer for creating a literary mixture when trying to combine literature and record, and for providing a far too detailed chronicle of events. This time Kipen represents things indirectly, displaying the ability referred to by the critic as the salient feature of his talent: his "artistic tact."³⁸ The pogrom takes place virtually backstage; the vantage point or scene of the narrative is located either on the periphery of the events, at a crossroads, among officers having breakfast or

37 Ibid., p. 140. The word "rabbi" is deliberately misspelled—written using a single "b"—in the speech of the Russian.

38 Gornfeld, A.: "Odinnadtsatyi sbornik Znan'ia," p. 69.

sitting bored at a restaurant situated there. The title is metaphorical; we are at the moment when roads must be chosen, as reflected by the rabbi's words at the exalted ending: for him to go somewhere is the same thing as one's purpose in life or its future direction. The dialogues between the officers, the liberal or anti-Semitic views expressed or inherent in them in the form of hints are, from a literary point of view, of an equal rank with Kipen's descriptions, who depicts the shaven neck of the officers or the hidden meaning of their glances with the same meticulous precision and psychological approach.

His portrayal is even more indirect and masterful from a psychological point of view in *Who Art in Heaven* (1910) where, one may say, all is hidden between the lines. The putting of child protagonists in the centre and the representation of the "adult world" through their eyes begins, as has already been mentioned, with Bogrov's works in Russian-Jewish literature. In this story by Kipen, however, the child's eye view was turned into an exclusive tool and method, maintained unwaveringly throughout, without as much as half a sentence or a single word of "speaking out" by the author. Kipen's work is the first in its own kind. Later on there would be many writers portraying the situation when children are unexpectedly confronted with their Jewish origin, about which they have just been told by someone. This form of assimilation, when parents, in the process of distancing themselves try to solve the problem for the next generation with a single stroke, and keep silent about Jewishness, would be a practice employed for a long time to come. In Russia and in Europe there were different reasons for this in every decade, the investigation of which would require special study, historical and sociological rather than literary in character.

I would like to mention two Russian examples in illustration. One is to be found in Lev Kassil's famous and excellent novel for the young, *The Black Book and Shwambrania* (1935). In the chapter "Where Oska Belongs" (*Samoopredelenie Os'ki*), the younger brother of the child storyteller is shocked upon learning that the family is Jewish. The story is set in 1917:

"Liolia, what does Jewish mean?"

"Well, it's a people... There are many different ones, for example, Russian, American, Chinese. And French and German. There are Jews, too."

"And could we be Jews?" Oska muses in surprise. "Just as a game or seriously? Tell me by your word of honour. Are we Jewish?"

"My word of honour. We are Jewish."

Oska is shocked by the discovery. He is tossing about sleeplessly for a long time. I am already half asleep when I hear him asking in whisper so as not to wake me up:

"Liolia!"

"What is it?"

"Is Mother Jewish too?"

"Yes. Sleep now."

[...]

Oska wakes up. His mind must have been busy thinking about the new discovery even in his sleep.

"Mom?"

"Why did you wake up? Sleep!"

"Mom," Oska asks, and he is already sitting up in his bed. "Mom, is our cat Jewish too?"³⁹

The next example is a wartime childhood memory from a book written a couple of years ago, during World War II. When the Soviet Union was invaded by the Germans and the population began to flee from Ukraine, evacuation started. Vova, the little boy, overhears this conversation of his uncle's family at night:

"Well, you may be right. The Germans are cultured people; they will do nothing to us. What would they want from us? We are not Communists, after all."

"And Vova?"

My mouth fell open even though I was almost asleep. I stopped breathing. What about Vova? Could it be that I was a Communist without knowing about it? Grandma said dogs were not admitted to the Party, but maybe children were... Maybe I had been admitted too, only I didn't know about it.

"What about Vova? He is your cousin, and you are Russian."

"Yes, I'm Russian but Rosa is Jewish, and if they learn about it..."⁴⁰

Kipen gives a laconic yet moving picture of the way in which sudden realization after the silence ("we are Jewish," "I am Jewish") may cause problems of self-esteem (readers keep encountering this problem in literature up to this day). Kipen returns to this theme in a different form later on in the short "etude," *On a Visit to Grandma* (1928),⁴¹ where there is no more realization and shock. The children have grown utterly remote from their great-grandfather. The old man dies a lonely death in the small garden house where

39 Kassil, L.: *Konduit i Shvambriiia*, 1999, pp. 146–7. The parts related to the Jewish issue were left out of the second, 1948 edition of Kassil's book.

40 Voinovich, V.: *Zamysel*, 1999, p. 313.

41 The story offers an interesting parallel to Babel's early story *Childhood. At Grandmother's* (1915), which appeared only posthumously, in 1965.

he retires in exile along with all the ritual accessories of Jewish Orthodoxy, looked at by the children as exotic objects. By this time Kipen himself views religious Jews from outside. His elevated Orthodox heroes are emblematic, legendary figures rather than well-formed, realistic characters.

This holds true also of works like *Meyer* (1928), the protagonist of which is the typical Jew. Meyer is a poor Jew, and he is anecdotally and wonderfully eccentric. The leg he lost in an accident is substituted by a foreign-made artificial leg bought on a donation from a countess, coupled with life-long free hospital care, so poor Meyer moves to the hospital to live. Meyer's monologues are written in the Russian-Jewish *skaz* idiom, in a Russian language the sentence structures and word usage of which are individualized and shaped by a Yiddish influence. The story is simple: in hospital, Meyer grows fond of a young man with typhoid, the son of the wealthiest man in town who, because of his convictions, left the parental home and supports himself by giving lessons. The young man explains the socialist ideas to Meyer, who is very much taken by the new thoughts, and thinks of Marx as a new Jewish prophet. (Meyer's character is akin to the old Parisian emigrant in Aizman's work *Al-lies*, who is filled with simplified ideas of socialism molded into Jewish culture.) The student is cured but Meyer catches the disease from him and dies. The structure of the plot, ending with a sad turn, is anecdotal, reminiscent of the classical novella, one of the fundamental forms used also by David Aizman and Isaac Babel.

We find the same form in Kipen's war story entitled *Gangrene* (1928). A Siberian peasant soldier ends up in hospital because his lung was punctured by a bullet, and the wound has become gangrened. He receives the news of his speedy recovery with bitter disappointment, because he is yearning for a decoration. It turns out only at the end as the point of the story that the peasant is a Jew, and winning a decoration would be his only way to win equal citizenship. So he goes back to the battlefield wounded, because he promised to his parents not to return home without a decoration. There is a pun in the story with a bitter irony: the soldier keeps repeating in his feverish dream "I want the cross," meaning only the decoration ("the St. George Cross," etc.), but by no means Christianity, as his neighbor thinks.

Kipen's most characteristic story is *The Horse Trader* (1910). The scene is as typically Russian as can be: it is the type of Russian country estate so familiar from 19th century Russian literature, where time passes slowly, spent with conversations about horses, dogs and farming, all in harmony with the seasons, and also at a comfortable distance from all great upheavals. Götz, the Jewish horse trader, is not only a companion of equal rank in all this but a

genuine master of his trade. His world is the stables, and all that can be known about horses. He is a born horse trader, able to anticipate even the hidden thoughts of his customers. He is self-confident, aware of his physical prowess and his driving skills, never giving way to those coming from the opposite direction, and never letting the gendarmes humiliate him. The scene in which he lifts his axle-broken carriage alone would be repeated in a work by Andrei Sobol: in *Slow Stream* a runaway horse is being bridled by Moisei Davidovich (see later).

For the sake of comparison, Kipen sets Götz side by side with Mendel, the subservient type of Jew who tries to get along with the gendarmes by the well-tried method of bribery. Götz is a religious Jew although no slave to the rules. He makes references to the Talmud but observes the Shabbat only when he has the opportunity. (Sobol's Siberian Jewish farmer does the same.) Götz's relationship to nature is also different from that of the previous Jewish characters: he spends nights in stables, and the steppe is his homeland.

Beside Mendel, the character of the landowner also offers itself for comparison. Bukharin makes his first appearance like a scaled-down Oblomov, languishing in bed in the morning when Götz surprises him. There are haunting reminiscences of Goncharov's work later on, too, especially in close-up images of the declining estate. Everything is crumbling and falling apart; the garden is overgrown with weeds. Götz, too, is one of the surviving witnesses of the one-time flourishing of the estate, which is another factor connecting the two men. Forever loyal, Götz would not criticize Bukharin, not even to his relative. Bukharin, on the other hand, does not have the strength to protect Götz from the gendarmes, who only recently got the courage to enter his estate without asking permission. The disintegration of the estate is not meant to complete the characterization of Bukharin, but has a more general meaning; it is an allegory of the decline of traditional rural Russian life and society. If Jews are strangers, immigrants to be deported under the escort of gendarmes, can "genuine" Russians still feel comfortable and at home?—the author asks indirectly, and he also shows that Götz does feel at home even when he is forced to roam, because he is skilled at what he is doing and enjoys his work. It is no accident that Goncharov is being evoked rather than Turgenev, who idealized the Russian nobles' countryside. It is as if with the emptying of traditional Russian life, Kipen were withdrawing from Russian society the moral right to treat Jews as foreigners and intruders.

David Aizman
(1869–1922)

Aizman began to write in emigration in France, when he had already decided to devote himself to art (he had actually gone to Paris to study painting). During the two decades of his career as a writer he was known primarily as an author of short stories but he also wrote plays. His social sensitivity, which carried him to the circle of the *Znaniie* volumes and close to Gorky, can be traced back to his childhood experiences. His brothers, a great deal older than himself, had been revolutionaries, activists of the working class movement. Vladimir, the owner of a bookshop, turned pro-Palestine after the pogroms of 1881–1882, and began to organize emigrant groups. His other brother had participated in the socialist movement and was sentenced to exile, from where he returned ill. Aizman wrote about all this in an introductory autobiographical essay, adding that he was happy about the appearance of his book but with reservations, since he could not go to Moscow either to take care of things connected with the publication of his book or to the opening of his theatre plays because, being Jewish, he had no residence permit. Neither was he allowed to live in his native town as it had been removed from the Pale of Settlement permitted for Jews...⁴²

The backdrop against which Aizman's works should be viewed is the early socialist movements, the life of Russian Jews, the Parisian artists' world and the exiles' life. In his early works, all four worlds are present. *Drifting Ice* (1905) portrays, through two children of a Jewish family, two potential paths for Jews. A young man returning from Paris regards the struggle for rights as the only solution, while his consumptive sister devotes herself with a burning passion to reviving the Hebrew language and organizing emigration to Palestine. What is really interesting is not so much their debates in which all the turgidity and artificiality of 19th century Russian-Jewish prose are present, but Aizman's repeated, almost refrain-like descriptions of silent, bleak, dirty and gloomy big-city nights and depressing landscapes. There can be little doubt that the feverish plans and grandiose designs remain without echo in such a land where all is covered in gime and darkness, and swallowed by poverty, suffering and wailing. It is only at the end of the story that a faint glimmer of hope appears, in the defiance awakening in the frightened parents.

42 Aizman, D.: *Redaktor Solntsev. Sbornik rasskazov s avtobiograficheskimi ocherkami*, 1926.

Aizman is interested in the psychology of crime born of extreme misery and humiliation in the pages of *Diary of a Criminal Act* (1901) and *The Shroud* (1903). The "crime" is simply that a Jewish father, whose children are crying of hunger at home, gets some work at long last when hired to move furniture, and he steals and eats up the two kilos of stew cooked by the mistress of the house, so he gets nothing for the hauling, goes home empty handed, and dreams about the smell of bay-leaves. The protagonist of *The Shroud* is a sixteen year old breadwinner supporting an entire family who would like to buy a decent shroud for his dying father, as prescribed by Jewish custom, but is unable to get work to earn the money for it. Aizman creates a situation in which the boy gets into desperate trouble because of his naïve sincerity and his being at the mercy of others. He asks an old acquaintance, a Ukrainian inn-keeper, for a job, and when the inn-keeper refuses to hire him, he confesses that he is so desperate for money that he originally went there to steal: he wanted to carry off his bicycle. In his wild anger, the inn-keeper beats him up, knocks his eye out, and blames him for each and every theft happening there. Besides describing the action, Aizman continually increases the tension by showing how the boy is gradually overcome by recrimination and self-accusations dictated by the traditions. "A great first-born I am... The soul of the deceased will never find peace; it will wander the earth and search for his shroud... It is only the soul of the sinners that wanders like this..." Even lying there in his blood, he still thinks about this: "Why didn't he kill me? It would be so much better to die... But then he remembered that he must not die; he must find a shroud for his father to save his soul from eternal wandering..." Aizman's reserved narrative style departs from its strictly objective, outsider's stance only to the extent of a description at the end of the story: "The rain was pouring; it was cold and dark. It seemed as if in the outraged sun itself had turned away from this evil land of misfortune and violence, never to return and look back upon it again."⁴³

Aizman's last work in this early period, previous to the pogrom, is *Allies* (1905). The framework for the story is provided by an encounter: a Russian socialist who, broken after his exile in Russia, has escaped to Paris and makes the acquaintance of the old general servant of the "Jewish free university." The old Jew tells the story of his life. He has travelled the world, but had no luck and found no place for himself anywhere. He tried to trade in Philadelphia and Africa, sold pictures of the Dreyfus Trial, drove a roundabout, and

43 Aizman, D.: "Savan," *Aizman: Sobraniie sochinenii*, t. 1, 1911, pp. 138, 149, 150.

the graves of his relatives are scattered all over the world. He found a home at the free university where he picked up everything from the lectures. "Socialism [*sic*] is the chief science now. God's sky has a single sun, mankind has two: Marx and Lassalle, and both are ours." "Both the Old Testament and the New Testament were given to the world by the Jews, and we also gave the newest new testament, which is socialisme."⁴⁴ This naive socialist "catechism" does not only anticipate the theory of "god-building,"⁴⁵ created by Gorky and Lunacharsky (Gorky wrote *Confession* in 1908–1909, and Lunacharsky finished *Religion and Socialism* in 1910), but indicates the naive Messianic faith of Jewish socialism, of the Bund, offering thereby a clear and handy target to anti-Semitic antisocialists already at the beginning of the 20th century. Old Bernstein, all his misfortune regardless, keeps glancing homeward, yearning for home despite the memory of the pogroms, to the land where Jews are persecuted. "Yes, I know; others say so too. But what do you think? Do you really think that if I have a mother and she has consumption, then I should hate her, and leave her alone? Everybody cannot emigrate!"⁴⁶

This persistence of homesickness is represented even more clearly by the simple-minded hero of *Go Home...* (1908). The character of Azriel is created by Aizman in such a way that the world remains interpreted within the confines of the "common man's" world. Nothing is explained, nothing is verbalized. There are no words. Neither the crazy mother nor the father is capable of coherent speech. Sonia, who is in exile, does not write letters, and Simon, mentally and physically wounded after the pogrom and tossed from one idea to the next, also talks incoherently. Azriel himself has difficulties in linking his worlds properly. Aizman does not preach the retaining of patriotism against all odds; he merely says that despite pogroms, misery and drifting about in the world, three people are tied to the earth of the place where they were born by a kind of vague instinct because all they have is the place with which they are connected by their sheer birth and by their memories. This country is an imagined "motherland," a fictitious home.

44 Ibid., t. 2, pp. 276, 290. The misspelt form "socialism" and the French word *socialisme* are written in this way in the Russian text.

45 "God-building": according to this theory, the new ideas of socialism should be formulated as a new religion for the Russian people accustomed to religion, so that the "new faith" can spread. In their works, Gorky and Lunacharsky call socialists "new apostles," and the factories and workshops "new temples" in which the earthly paradise, the world of equality and justice is being created by the hand of the new god, man himself.

46 Ibid., p. 288.

Aizman devoted two works to the pogrom of 1905, trying to express the inexpressible in two different ways. *The Heart of Being* (1906) is a symbolic psychological "chamber play," and *Flood of Blood* (1906) an expressionistic epic panorama. *The Heart of Being* is set in a hospital ward. Pavliuk, a Ukrainian harness-maker injured in a tavern brawl, is taken to the Jewish hospital. His condition is deteriorating; he murmurs long-forgotten prayers in his fear of death, sees imaginary icons, and keeps thinking of God and the other world. Afraid of punishment, he is hoping for forgiveness of his sins in a cowardly way. When he looks out the window, he sees the hospital gate, and has a vision that the gate is being pushed in by a crowd trying to escape, as if tens of thousands of people were huddled there in the hope of survival for days without food or drink, and he also sees dead bodies lined up by the thousands in the alleys, because there is no room to bury them—and realizes that all this is not a nightmare vision but a memory. This vision of pogrom is a mythical animalization of the horror, Aizman creates a dragon-like monster poetically exaggerated by the rhythm of triple repetition, stylistically corresponding to the ornamental prose of contemporary Russian symbolists. "Three days kept coming up most frequently in his memory. Those three days were like three serpents, three serpents with eyes of fire, serpents with tongues of flame, serpents crying in a human voice, covered in blood..."⁴⁷ He thinks to hear the voice of children and mothers toppled upon the dead bodies even in the howl of the wind. When he turns his head, he sees mad Moisei with his jet black beard, the one-time teacher who drank hydrochloric acid, and now talks to no one. The description, flowing over into each other, of past and present mirror the process whereby the events evoked in memories turn into pangs of conscience. "He could not believe that this was a man on the bed next to him; it seemed as if the line of trees in the alley had gone on, and come up here, with coffins in the place of the trees, and now the blackest and tallest coffin had climbed upon the bed and were waiting there..."

Moisei's figure, painted in black and gold, suggests suffering and elevated sanctity, the gold star exalting him like a glory, even before we knew anything about his life: "Moisei sat out in the sun a little later... The dying yellow and red leaves were silently praying over him. When their life was over, they fell upon him or beside him on the ground, and when he came back to the ward, in his hair there was a huge aspen leaf fallen silent forever, the pale light of gold glimmering on it, the five-pointed leaf shining like an evening star..."

47 Aizman, D.: "Serdtshe Bytiia," *Aizman: Sobraniie sochinenii*, t. 2, 1911.

Moisei does not go to pray on the holiday of the Jewish New Year. When the two of them remain alone in the ward, he suddenly begins to speak. Pavliuk yearns for peace and consolation. Moisei, however, tells how his entire family was massacred in the pogrom, how his pregnant daughter was raped and her arm sawn off before his eyes. Moisei asks for Pavliuk's help in killing the Heart of Being at the end of the world, which governs everything. All evil comes from it, he says, and all that is supposed to be beautiful and good, like happiness and religion, is nothing but the deception of the Heart of Being. "Even a castrated horse taken down to a mine for ever is given some fodder every now and then... Men cast into the darkness of being are also thrown a bunch of lies sometimes..."⁴⁸ One can fly to the Heart of Being on a pillowcase, because it is "many million millimeters" from here, and the pillowcase must be filled with the moans and sighs of his murdered children... The dying Pavliuk groans at every mention of blood, and confesses that he killed four or five people in October, raped a girl, and the bodies were brought here, to this hospital. Moisei suddenly believes he has recognized the murderer of his family in him. But he wants no revenge, only his help to annihilate the Heart of Being.

Pavliuk, however, does not die after the crisis. It is as if, following the confession, he had received pardon from death, whom Aizman represents in the form of a male figure prowling the hospital ward. Pavliuk is recovering, and as his condition improves, his old mood is beginning to return to him. Women, inns and revenge fill his thoughts. On the day of his release, he puts on the clothes bloodstained from the fight, and before his departure, he threatens Moisei not to tell anyone about what he heard from him that night, because it was not true in the first place, and no one would believe a Jew anyway, even if he told anyone about it. There is no answer from Moisei. He does not even listen, because he has just found a new pillowcase...

The tale about the Heart of Being is a symbolic story; not only because it creates a great symbol, that of eternal evil that exists in the world, but also because by introducing the image of a dark force, an evil *Weltgeist*, a spider manipulating a Kafkaesque world, it relegates the unanswerable question "how can there be so much evil in this world?" into the sphere of the irrational. We can recognize the influence of symbolical prose also in the broadening of some images into motifs: the gate of the hospital courtyard, the heavy, slowly opening gate between sanity and madness and the gate protect-

48 Ibid., pp. 56, 59, 76.

ing the Heart of Being with a Russian general standing guard produce a complex motif that will not obey simplified explanations. Death, walking in the glimmering night lights, is a dark, somber figure, but nevertheless an ordinary human being who meditates beside the beds of the patients and decides whom to take and whom not to. Aizman does not even attempt to do justice by means of realist prose, or have revenge or punishment by death brought about by the writer's will, which got these two particular men, murderer and victim, together in the first place. Violence and wickedness continue to flourish unabated, good gets no reward, nor evil its punishment, and the world goes on as it did before.

Flood of Blood (1906) aims at the "external" portrayal of tragedy. It shows types: the two children in the family of an Orthodox Christian priest. One of them, the weak-willed Fyodor Paskhalov, has already done hard labor in Kolymsk, and works now as a doctor at a hospital. His younger sister is a revolutionary, hides pistols, and, at the end of the narrative, commits an assassination attempt against the governor. Paskhalov supports the family of a Jewish childhood friend who died early: Abram, his paralytic wife, who suffers from obesity because of her illness, and is confined to a wheelchair, and their gifted daughter. Even though there are only a couple of types in the story, Aizman provides a social panorama through their character, while the turns of events in the story affect the feelings of the reader. Paskhalov grows especially fond of a good-natured young Russian boy in the hospital who, hopping about on a broken leg in a cast, in an effort to save a hen from the dog chasing it, trips and breaks his leg again. This insignificant episode gains importance later on in retrospect: when the pogrom is imminent, the kind-hearted boy asks to be released because he does not want to be left out of the fun. Paskhalov suspects the reason why the boy is in such a hurry, but he does not have the courage to expose him, he just waves in disappointment and lets him go. The next time he sees him is precisely when Abram's house is being sacked, and the other *muzhiki* released from hospital are with him, too. If only Paskhalov had kept them inside... The action is developed by Aizman in a way which makes it impossible not to infer that the pogrom, among other things, was also a consequence of the impotence of the Russian intelligentsia, and they are to be blamed for it too.

The climax is the actual massacre, preceded by an attempt by Abram and the girl to escape, which fails because they are refused shelter everywhere by everyone. Abram is knocked down; the girl clings to the attacker of her disabled mother. She is flung to the ground by the *muzhik*. Aizman describes the horrible scene in laconic sentences broken into short lines. With a superhu-

man effort, the mother, a huge mass of flesh, stands up for the first time in years and, like a Golem coming to life, tries to move to the defence of her daughter with a knife in her lame hand.

Khana walked.

She was already half-way across the room.

But then a samovar flew out of the kitchen, hitting her in the belly.

Her mouth fell open, she cried out in a strange, deep voice, began to shake her head, lost her balance, and like a bronze statue toppling from its pedestal, tumbled on the threshold, upon the leg of the motionless Abram.

"I'm coming," she screamed, clutching the knife, "I'm coming!"

But she did not.

She lay there motionless like a huge, heavy sack dropped from a carriage, and kept on screaming, choking, grasping for breath:

"Oh God! God! God, where are you?"

And what they did to her daughter was done right in front of her face.

[...]

The mob was gone.

There was complete silence in the home.

Abram was almost completely stripped and flung upon the naked body of her daughter.

Khana lay where she had fallen, stuffed in her mouth was her daughter's cut-off breast, dripping blood.⁴⁹

Aizman almost literally repeats a situation which we have already encountered in Yaroshevsky's work (*In a Maelstrom*, the fate of Pavel) as well as in that of Kipen (*In October (1905)*, Lit'agin's fate), in which an intellectual, weak but still wanting to help, is crushed by the merciless mechanism of the pogrom. Paskhalov is also shouted at that he is a gentleman after all, and if he defends the Jews, then he must be one of them himself, so they set upon him. Although he is recognized later on and, taken to hospital, escapes, he goes insane. (Just like another character in Aizman's work: the mother in *Go Home...*)

The most harrowing parts of *Flood of Blood* are the eventless chapters combining naturalistic detail with feverishly rhythmic, expressionistic sentences. The descriptions, shifting between different viewpoints, and jumping to and fro between scenes, have a terrifying effect, and the portrayal of the festive mood of people getting ready for the pogrom is chillingly grotesque. Pas-

49 Aizman, D.: "Krovavyi razliv," *Aizman: Sobraniie sochinenii*, t. 2, 1911, p. 200.

khalov precisely anticipates what is to come, but all he is able to do is register the general atmosphere. "Paskhalov thus far made no difference between the two nations, Jewish and Russian; he saw them as two kinds of wine poured into the same glass. But now they stood before him as two solid objects, which did not even touch."⁵⁰ The *muzhiki* are coming by carriages from the countryside, and are accepted into the homes of the townspeople as if a great celebration were about to come: traditional Slav hospitality blooms. Getting ready for the massacre forges the people together; Aizman likens them to cowardly beasts intoxicated with the anticipation of killing with impunity. The whole of Chapter 6 is about the psychology of escape. There is no running away from the pogrom, yet people are making efforts to get out of the trap, to save their possessions and their lives. A recurrent minor detail is that Abram's daughter is seeking for a place to hide the prize-book she got from her teacher of Christian religion at school, *The Heroes of Greece*, and she finally puts it next to the prayer-book. The three concepts, Eastern Christian religion, Greek heroes and the Jewish prayer-book ending up side by side in the moments before the murder is a tragic irony. Together they represent everything, the spirit, beauty, culture, education, religion, faith, law and love, that ought to raise a barrier and prevent the murders, and yet they fail; they are useless and powerless in the moment when the worst instincts get loose. Chapter 14 is a mercilessly detailed and dry description of the collection and burial of the dead through seven pages. Aizman's intention here is to report, to horrify and to shock, and his rhetoric leads him and his texts faultlessly along the narrow path avoiding the threats of formal pathos and overemotional grief.

The title of *Rue de Rosier*⁵¹ is emblematic for the East European Jewish Diaspora, and especially for emigrants from Russia. Jews emigrating after the pogroms, mainly after 1905, settled in this street, and made it the main street of the old Jewish quarter of Paris, which it is up to this day. This depressing world of misery and crowdedness, Aizman writes, is a mere couple of minutes' away from the rue de Rivoli and the Notre Dame. This is where the three young heroes of Aizman's story are slaving for a living. They are Russians only in their language; they know no homesickness, perhaps they have no

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 126.

⁵¹ The story appeared in the third of the nine volumes of the *Collected Works* published between 1911 and 1919. The date of its writing is unknown. It is related in its theme to *Allies* but its place is not next to it in the second volume. The main title of the third volume is *In a Foreign Land*, and it contains also pieces treating non-Jewish topics. My assumption is that this story is a later piece than *The Heart of Being* and the other works in the second volume.

memory of Russia any more, they belong nowhere, and "have nothing to do, no job and no bread." They look at the French people having fun in the parks and the forests around Paris on Sundays as strangers they have nothing in common with—but the girl also with a touch of envy. They do not speak French but no Hebrew either any more. "Let us be happy!" is being repeated desperately by Riva who makes wreaths for graves sixteen hours a day. Motifs involving death are predominant throughout the story. When she is kissed for the first time by Mark, Riva catches sight of the mortuary from the window of the attic room, and shivers. As their relationship develops, Aizman creates growing tension by the increase of contradictory, ambivalent elements. The virginal Riva matures into a woman, desires happiness, shrinks back from the somber Mark, and becomes frightened. She is estranged from him, and they break up. On the other hand, Mark's tender feelings, parallel with his delving increasingly deeply into Kabbalistic teachings, grow into wild erotic desires to which he is too afraid to give way, and escapes from his feverish dreams and from the misery of reality into mysticism. He feels unclean, and dreams about the guilty and the righteous. He indulges now in self-torture, now in heavenly enjoyment; suffering and ecstasy merge into chaos in him. His fantasies are nourished by the mystic doctrine of the Kabbala, translated for him by an old Jew. According to the teachings of the Kabbala, the spirit of sinners moves into a different body after their death, where it tries to live a just life again. However, as this would mean that the spirit of those who keep sinning would be sentenced to eternal suffering, the merciful Creator wisely arranged that this should happen three times at the most. If the spirit has still not been able to become just and pure, then it ascends into heaven, to wait for the last day there. At the time of the creation of the universe, a certain number of spirits were created, but not all of them were given earthly bodies to dwell in. The last day comes when all spirits have been to earth, and all have been purified by earthly suffering. If all men and women were pure, then every spirit would have to visit the earth only once, but if one is sinful, the spirit descends three times. The last one to descend and become embodied is the spirit of the Messiah, because his soul has also been existing and waiting since the beginning of the time; its appearance is delayed only by the cycles completed by the spirits of sinners. But when he comes, Death will die, and all the dead will be resurrected and rise from their graves. Then the sky and the earth will unite, and man will also become one with God. Mark draws the ultimate conclusion from this doctrine: if sinners spend less time down here, and leave the earth sooner, then they speed up the coming of the Messiah, as guilty spirits return to the earth only three times. Thus the task of

guilty men like himself is clear as daylight. So when Riva asks him not meet her again, he jumps out of the window—the same window through which Riva saw the mortuary when they first kissed.

Riva's other admirer, whom she rejects, is Zheltukha, the anarchist. The three of them attend lectures together. Riva sympathizes with the Socialists, but cannot comprehend them; she wishes to learn. Zheltukha, however, preaches wild theories of total freedom, the destruction of everything. "Everybody is an enemy, all must be annihilated, the world turned upside down," he cries, but sets a worm creeping on the pavement carefully aside on the grass, lest anyone should tread on it. In Aizman's sharply outlined psychological portraits three lonely people on a search are suffering in an alien vacuum. The two wildly philosophizing boys are hungry for love, while the girl yearns for human warmth, but these youths are prevented from helping each other partly because of the remoteness from life of the ideologies they profess, and partly because of the growth of lies in love. Zheltukha (which would translate into jaundice or "Yellow One" in English) got his nickname from his sickly complexion, yellowish eyes and hair. The two boys, the sensitive Mark, who escapes into the celestial heights of mysticism, and the diabolic-looking, nihilist-anarchistic, all-denying Zheltukha, are locked in a kind of spiritual duel for the soul of the girl. Rejecting both of the obsessed boys, Riva, however, tries to run away towards real life. Zheltukha also dies: he is blown to pieces while carrying explosives somewhere. His sister is a prostitute who lands in prison because she kills her pimp for brutalizing her. There is nothing but impasses all around Riva.

Aizman passes heavy judgement upon emigrant Jews who are no longer drawn back to the old country, nor paralyzed by homesickness, and not being pulled back by the separating, isolating power of Judaism either. Assimilated they may be, but remain outsiders all the same, and remain Jewish even if broken away from their roots. Whether they look for a path backwards, like Mark, who turns to Jewish mysticism, or try to rush forward and away like the nihilist Zheltukha, or attempt to worm their way into the surrounding people like the prostitute, they are all doomed. The question remains open as to what awaits Riva to whom, for the time being, female life instinct and the desire for finding a way out gave just enough strength for survival. Aizman was a reserved, highly disciplined writer, careful to keep his distance, especially when compared to his predecessors. His contemporary, Yushkevich was a far more emotional type, who either gave free vent to his feelings or represented his characters from inside.

Semyon Yushkevich (1868-1927)

Yushkevich may be called the most popular and widely read Russian-Jewish writer in his own time, as well as in the short history of Russian-Jewish literature thus far.⁵² His popularity did not at all mean that he was liked by everyone; he was attacked by critics for many reasons and from many sides—but they certainly did him the service of writing a lot about him. He did not really care about Russians who regarded him too limited and uninteresting, or criticized him for not writing in Russian “correctly” enough, and he was equally uninfluenced by Jews who called his works anti-Semitic.

The eminent essayist Arkady Gornfeld evaluated the work of Yushkevich virtually in the knowledge of his entire life-work in 1923, in the article mentioned in the introduction of my book. When discussing whether Russian-Jewish literature contributed anything to Russian literature, Gornfeld observes that so far of course there had been no genius of the stature of Tolstoy among Russian-Jewish authors. “Only one of them, Yushkevich, this crude, tasteless, monotonous and often insufferable writer, only Yushkevich appears at times powerful and authentic, instinctively direct, genuinely original, an artist ‘in the same sense’ as the great ones.”⁵³

Sergei (Israil) Tsinberg devoted two articles to Yushkevich, calling him “The Reality-Describer of Disintegration” in 1904,⁵⁴ and “The Assimilated Reality-Describer of Jewry” in 1910. According to Tsinberg, early on, Yushkevich convincingly portrayed the misery of Jews and lower-middle-class people living on the outskirts of town, and “is not inclined to spare the nerves of his readers: a characteristic feature of his talent is his morbid attraction to dismal, shocking and hopelessly sick matters.” He is not talented enough, though, to provide a genuine picture of Jewry because “he is a child of the age of disintegration himself... attracted mainly by the life of the Jewish ghetto, but he is already outside that ghetto, and does no longer understand the internal life of Jewry; and what he has not experienced, has not felt, only heard about, he cannot realistically

52 To repeat a figure mentioned in the introductory chapter: at the turn of the century, the popularity list among Jewish readers of literary works translated to Yiddish was lead by Aleksei Tolstoy, followed by Korolenko. Gorky was third, and the fourth place was occupied by Semyon Yushkevich. Kirzhnits, op. cit., p. 58.

53 Gornfeld, A.: “Russkoie slovo i evreiskoie tvorchestvo,” *Evreiskii almanakh*, ed. B. I. Kaufman, I. A. Kleinman, Petrograd & Moscow, 1923, p. 191.

54 Tsinberg, S. (I.): “Bytopisatel’ raspada,” *Evreiskaia zhizn’* 6 (1904).

reproduce.”⁵⁵ Tsinberg also complains that some of Yushkevich’s characters speak like Dostoevsky’s Marmeladov, as if they had been brought up in a Christian spirit (e.g. in the story *New Prophet* a barroom pianist tells a prostitute that he “drained the cup of bitterness to its dregs”). With regard to *Leon Drei*, but even more to Yushkevich’s dramas *Money* and *The Comedy of Marriage*, Tsinberg accuses the author of no less than drawing a caricature of Jewry. (The scene in Act II of *The Comedy of Marriage* is the waiting room of a gynaecologist specializing in abortion, where bored or adulterous wives and prostitutes are having a conversation. This scene makes a mockery of the Jewish ideal of respect for the holiness of the family.) The essay’s final conclusion is that Yushkevich is a tragic figure because he wants to unmask social mores but instead of satire he fabricates bad jokes. The author finds the reason for this lies in the fact that the writer “grew up in an assimilated southern big-city milieu, and remained a stranger to his people, losing touch with it, and was also unable to make his way among other people because he was even more of an outsider there. His talent dies, his works wither...”⁵⁶ Tsinberg’s article vividly illustrates the antipathy created by Yushkevich in the Jewish community which, nevertheless, rushed to see his plays in great numbers, and read every one of his works.

The main subject of most of the reviews and essays written on Yushkevich is his plays. Arkady Gornfeld’s definition of how he saw the talent of Yushkevich was based also on a drama, *Hunger*, published in the *Znaniie* volume. I shall only select the features from the articles which appear to characterize Yushkevich in general, that is, the prose writer as well as the dramatist. According to Gornfeld, part of the originality of Yushkevich’s language consists in the mirror translation of Yiddish turns of speech. At the same time, however, his characters act little but talk a lot, and “all in the same language, a monotonous, crazy, fantasy language that is spoken neither by Russians nor by Jews.” Yushkevich is fond of the hyperbole. His originality is undoubted; he may be tasteless, or his characters repulsive, but he is unmistakably unique, and learned from no one. His figures are not individual characters, and the chief role is played by their mass, the Jewish people, the “collective psychology” of the crowd, Gornfeld writes. (The only exception from this will be, in prose, *Leon Drei*.)

The most comprehensive, most professional and also most interesting essay on Yushkevich up to this day was written by Vladislav Khodasevich,⁵⁷ who

55 Tsinberg, S. (I.): “Assimilirovannyi bytopisatel’ evreistva,” *Evreiskii mir* 1-2 (1910), pp. 131-2.

56 Ibid., pp. 141-2.

57 Vladislav Khodasevich (Moscow, 1886 – Billancourt, 1939) was a Russian poet whose father was Polish and his mother Jewish. He emigrated in 1922, and published a volume of

divides the work of Yushkevich into three periods. In the beginning, he writes, Yushkevich, similarly to his literary forerunners, said in literature things which ought to have been the subject of journalistic discussion. From the mid-nineties on, he gave a realistic picture of society, which appeared to be a highly rewarding theme, as Russian readers knew very little about Jewish life. This method brought him recognition, but also made it very difficult for him to break out of this niche. However, one of Yushkevich's most characteristic and most enviable qualities was the perpetual drive to move on, the restless split in his mind which turned his attention increasingly towards the theatre in the second stage. He wanted to break free from the captivity of the detailed description of lifestyle, dress, and environment. First he tried, in *The Stranger* (1900), a play of experimental character, to approach typical heroes, also introducing some symbolist features in his work—under the influence of the plays of Leonid Andreyev according to Khodasevich. His subsequent trilogy (*Hunger, In a City, King*) as well as *Miserere* (1909) and the "destiny tragedy," *Mendel Spivak*, musters characters who, even though they declaim a lot, are nevertheless not the kind of "pedestrian prototypes" as those populating his earlier prose. Critics were often dissatisfied because he did not fulfill the universal requirement to treat "social problems, capitalists, revolution and the like," and they failed to notice that Yushkevich had actually got down to the themes of social struggle, social ills and revolution. It was in the second half of the "theatrical period," via the satires (*The Comedy of Marriage, Luft-mensch, The Devil*), that Yushkevich moved into his third, post-1907 creative period in which, instead of the poor and the losers, his works centre upon successful, happy, "winning" but repulsive protagonists, of whom the author is no longer fond. The good and the poor gradually vanish from the side of the aggressive, wicked, rich, merciless and disgusting characters. The chief work of this period, according to Khodasevich, is the novel *Leon Drei*.

Falling Apart, written in 1895–1897 but published only in 1902, is a typical work of Yushkevich's first period, which created quite a sensation. Through the story of a Jewish petty-bourgeois family, the some hundred-page-long novella grasps the crisis of family, an institution regarded as the pillar of Jewish

poems in Berlin, in his own translation, under the title *Jewish Poets* (1922). Later he settled near Paris, where he hardly wrote any poetry (unless some survived among the documents confiscated during the German occupation, when Khodasevich's widow was deported, and died in a concentration camp). Khodasevich was an eminent literary critic of the Russian emigrant community in Paris. His study appeared after the death of Yushkevich, in: *Yushkevich, S.: Sem' dnei i drugiye rasskazy*, Paris, 1933.

life as well as that of the history of Russian Jewry. Beside the split between "the fathers" and "the sons" and the generation change, walls rise up now even between the children, the brothers and sisters. The desperate parents have already reconciled themselves to their children having entered the path of assimilation; they accept that it is the road to progress, since learning is the only way for their children to get ahead and have a better future. The Rozenovs want affluence and an easy "respectable" life for the oldest son. Loans got Yakov through grammar school. However, he did not study well enough to be admitted to a Russian university despite being Jewish (he did not finish "with a gold medal"), and after five years, the money necessary for him to study abroad still could not be raised. Yakov hates poverty; he likes to wear fine shirts and fashionable neckties, and he would not put on a shirt if it had the tiniest speckle on it. He also hates his own life, his state as a semi-finished professional. Sometimes he muses that it might be better for him to learn some trade, which might enable him to earn a living, and gain independence from his parents. The missing money is raised by the parents by promissory notes and bank loans, then, at the news of a horse tramway being planned, they mortgage their house. Their calculations, however, do not work out: the tramway is built somewhere else. The second son, David, is a bookkeeper, but he is not moving "on the right track" either, because he failed "to make a rich girl fall in love with him," but took a poor one instead. The girl becomes pregnant, and David is disowned by his father.

Yushkevich's story appears at the first glance as a series of simple family problems, troubles and conflicts. The story also begins with a family quarrel, in which the participants offend each other more than they wanted to, and reveal their selfish thoughts in the course of the fight. The father reproaches the mother for not having cared enough for the children and for spending too much on the household. The mother criticizes the father for having chased money all his life, neglecting the children in the meantime. The parents cannot understand why the children do not take them into their confidence, why they leave them alone. And why they do not take the burden off their shoulders and take care of themselves and their parents too. The children do not understand why their parents must take life so tragically. There is nothing specifically Jewish about all this, only the background, making the general situation worse. The parents are building castles in the air, but while fantasizing about what a refined, famous and rich doctor their older son will be, one who would be gratefully remembered even after a thousand years, they at once begin to worry if it will be appropriate for them to appear in his high circles, and whether they will not damage his reputation.

At the end of the quarrel in the first chapter, the reserved Yakov silently kisses the hand of his mother. The "dramaturgical" function of this kiss is not to show the better part of Yakov's character, but points well beyond that. Each of the family members manifests his or her affection in a straightforward scene free from stereotypes. Yushkevich emphasizes that his characters are people fond of each other, worthy of a better life who themselves cannot understand what makes them turn on each other, and why they fight. Love is there in both brothers: David looks at his aging father with love mingled with pity; Sonya secretly sends money to her disowned son David, and the only reason why the father feverishly chases wild schemes for getting rich is that he would like to secure a better future and a life free of worries for his sons. He confesses that there was a moment when he was ready to set his house on fire so that he could pay his debts from the money he would receive from the insurance company. "We would all be happy and rich, I would not die, nor would Sonechka have to become a servant, and you would not become thieves either... or I'll get caught, and then forced labour, Siberia, and shame on me and my wife, shame on my children for ever, for the rest of my life, shame even on the children of my children. Sure, 'the arsonist'!"⁵⁸ "Do you think it is so hard to become a criminal?"⁵⁹ the mother asks in one of her endless laments. The sinister shadow of crime looms over the whole novel, and in the end it actually happens.

The conditions make the members of the family strangers and hostile to each other. However, the conditions, or the historical changes, if you like, are shown by Yushkevich only through personal destinies. Similarly to his predecessors, Yushkevich also describes the Jewish quarter of the small town without embellishing it. But unlike Aizman, rather than showing the interior through the exterior, or portraying, the misery and stifling closeness as mirrored by a squalid urban scene, he draws a psychological landscape: he defines this atmosphere through the profile and emotions of the crowd. In the internal monologues of the father, the entire process of all the joys of life turning into troubles and worries is being played out, and "the sheep driven by an invisible shepherd," the "gloomy, malevolent faces" create a single desire in him: the desire for death. The action moves in circles, ever deeper down the slopes of hell, a new disaster striking in every chapter, and everybody taking another step toward unhappiness and tragedy. The word "strike" (*udar*) is employed by Yushkevich in several senses: upon the bad news the father gets

58 Yushkevich, S.: "Raspad," *Knizhki Voskhoda* 1 (1902), p. 18.

59 Ibid., p. 31.

a stroke (he is “struck” = *udar*).⁶⁰ The real and actual circumstances of events are shown only in as much as they are necessary (supporting Khodasevich’s assumption that Yushkevich may have turned towards the theatre to get rid of the burden of details). Besides his elliptical narrative, Yushkevich also employs cinematic-type psychological “cuts” too: suddenly, without any transition, we find ourselves in the midst of the visions or nightmares of the characters, and see how they weigh up their future choices. David is getting ready to marry in secret and, while listening to the accusations of Liza’s mother, interwoven with that, he also hears his own mother speaking, and sees his three younger brothers: “The shadows drifting about his mother descended, and David could now see their faces. Pavka, Boris and Motya stood there; thin and scrawny, they were huddling close to each other. Behind them, in the same order, there were the same Pavka, Boris and Motya, just as thin and scrawny, and farther away Pavka, Boris and Motya once again....”⁶¹ The hyperbolic, multiplied picture of reality grows into an oppressive vision with the imaginary, unrealistic image turning into a model, a form, an abstract concept, an “idea” in the Platonic sense: the many miserable brothers appear as “the people” itself.

Every character is granted a full-scale monologue, based on which the reader can form a subtly shaded picture of a personality, a specific type, for himself, especially as Yushkevich keeps changing perspective, always putting the inner world of a different character in the centre. It appears to me that the critics charging that Yushkevich composed his picture of his age from typical characters in too large an extent were somewhat unjust; their judgement applies to this particular novella only in so far as, similarly to other writers, Yushkevich shows the potential paths of Jewry through brothers, but the pattern is employed in a highly individual manner.⁶²

In individualizing the characters, a key role is given to their manner of speech which, in the case of the older generation (the father but especially the mother), is solved by the author masterfully by the artistic use of the *skaz* speech. The stream of compulsive talk of the increasingly lonely, perplexed

60 Yushkevich, S.: “Raspad,” *Knizhki Voskhoda* 2 (1902), pp. 2, 3.

61 Ibid., p. 259.

62 The lives of the brothers are no doubt typical: Yakov travels abroad to study in the hope of getting ahead and having a richer life. David lives in deep poverty and honesty, exhibiting signs of schizophrenia and physical and mental weakness. Lyova takes part in organizations: first he is pro-Palestine, then an illegal Socialist. He is expelled from grammar school and arrested. Motya is a gifted child but he is not admitted to grammar school, and wastes his time at home. His father intends him to be a scientist, his mother a salesman. Pavlik is sickly, asthmatic, in need of an operation.

woman and her fits of self-convincing come forth in a typical Russian-Jewish language suggesting not only Yiddish turns of speech but also Yiddish sentence structures or their influence. Most characteristic are her questions put to herself: "Science is a joke then? A stock exchange of some kind or house-building?" It is already observable, too, that lesser monologues are poeticized in a highly effective way, by the employment of rhetorical structures like hyperbolic images, exaggerated intensification, or tripled parallels of sentences often in the form of questions. (The greatest master of these later on would be Babel, a genuine *skaz* artist, who obviously learned a lot from Yushkevich.)⁶³ The repetitive rhetoric structures and interposed sentences (as well as the erroneous structures and incoherent sentences) serve, in the case of female dialogues, as a vehicle for conveying the scheming and naiveté of the gossiping women in a comical manner. The speech of the real-estate agent Anchel, however, already borders on parody:

Why shouldn't you have a fine morning today... so I'm a bit late today, but I'd like to see someone who wouldn't be late today in my place! Ten matters I had to take care of early in the morning! Twenty matters I had to take care of early in the morning! Fifty matters early in the morning, all taken care of by a single man! I'll tell you this city will not bear all this misfortune... But this is nothing! What? You are afraid? I have yet to see a single courageous woman... I'm sweating a bit still. I have never seen a man sweating this much. A nice habit it is, I can tell you...

[...]

Don't tell me no newspapers, I'm not a kid any more... I spent two fortunes before I became Anchel! If you are born Jewish you'd better not be born at all... Well, don't be afraid. I'm telling you, I'm human too. I know everything, and I know everything well. We'll find out something.⁶⁴

Anchel's seven or eight page long torrents of words are full of wonderful deals and fabulous business proposals one after the other.⁶⁵

The stages of disintegration follow each other. David loses his job, and looks for another in vain; he cannot find any. The humiliating situations due

63 For example: "I was a beast to him? I didn't understand my son? How could I not have helped my own son, my own flesh and blood?" Yushkevich, S.: "Raspad," *Knizhki Voskhoda* 2 (1902), p. 7.

64 Yushkevich, S.: "Raspad," *Knizhki Voskhoda* 2 (1902), pp. 2, 3, 15, 16, 17.

65 A genuine pearl of Russian-Jewish *skaz* is *Jewish Happiness* (1912). The story is the monologue of a woman telling about the misfortunes of her family, and the slow departure of the misfortunes. "Jewish happiness" is when the misery of everyday life returns to normal, that is, nothing special happens...

to unemployment and being supported by the father-in-law are exploited mercilessly by Yushkevich through cruel family quarrels; open selfishness is manifest in the other penniless family, too. This kind of portrayal of the Jewish family was what brought on Yushkevich the charge of anti-Semitism, levelled against him by critics, even though (as he was forced to explain later, in connection with other works) he wanted to provide a psychological portrait of the petty bourgeois family or (he said elsewhere) that of the bourgeoisie. These critics failed to notice that Yushkevich was able to show pity and compassion—sometimes even tragedy—in the caricature. An example for this is his portrayal of the father at the railway station on Yakov's departure. Sweating in the tight overcoat inherited from his son, Isaac is charging ahead while keeping an eye on every member of his family like a mother hen, trying to secure the best seat for his son, who is provided with everything for the journey, his money sewn into his coat. Of all the advice he is giving, the most important would be that Yakov should be the first and the best everywhere, in whatever he does, and must become a famous scientist, because that is a glorious thing... However, the secular variant of the traditional Jewish respect for knowledge transplanted into science is not among the goals of the new generation: all Yakov wants is a good job and a comfortable life, and his father stands there crestfallen at the very moment of his dream coming true, when his firstborn son is leaving for the world.

Finally the shadow of total impoverishment looms up (the bank pays only half as much in credit on the house as was hoped, while Yakov is asking for money in his letters), but the mother is ready to do anything for the family: in the hope of insurance money, she sets the house on fire, giving no thought to the people, much poorer even than they are, living in huts stuck to their house, who will all become homeless. Yushkevich devotes an entire chapter to the hour before the lighting of the house. The mother is tormented, and is seen praying for the first time: she asks for a miracle or for the Lord to approve of the crime she is about to commit.

The function of exposing her inner struggle is not only to intensify emotions, or to serve as a kind of crescendo taking the reader to a closing of the story on the highest note, but to show how, while sacrificing herself in order to save her family, Sonya sentences herself to utter loneliness. Sonya lights the attic, and while walking up there on the staircase, she is ascending towards God:

Rozenova walked up and up, praying all the time to her merciless and beloved God, who she hated now with the whole might of a criminal forced to commit the crime...

[The] blind, merciless firestorm raging unbridled over the head of innocent, poor people involuntarily made one have second thoughts about the kind of divine justice in which the innocent are forced to redeem the sinners...⁶⁶

Rozenova loses, or "gambles away" even her last refuge and companion, her husband. The elderly, tired couple used to cling together even in the worst trouble, amid the wildest quarrels. They would go to bed at night giving warmth to each other, body and mind. Now the Rozenovs are separated from each other by a wall created by a criminal act. Isaac looks over the wailing, crying poor people who lived like relatives in his yard, and cannot bear to look at his wife again. And she takes to the habit of following him around like a watchdog, to prevent him from inadvertently spilling out the secret somewhere. The last wisdom and conclusion for Sonya is that "it's everybody for himself, everybody against everybody else." "Man is a wolf to man," this crude adage sounds in another form, which implies Sonya's favourite complaint: children are like wolf cubs. Having been brought up, they leave for the world ungratefully, without as much as looking back, like wild animals. But by the end of the story she has turned into a wolf herself.

The last chapter, numbered aptly the 13th, is a description of the great fire, the end of the world. In this chapter Yushkevich gives free reign to the emotions he kept in check thus far. The raging of the elements and the frenzy of wild instincts go together with the breakdown of all linguistic barriers, and a veritable rhetoric torrent getting loose. The sky is painted red by the fire. The clouds were drifting rapidly by, their rims in flames... [P]illars of fire reached towards the heavens like begging hands, ever higher, to soften the heart of divinity, to ask for redemption, for peace from its right hand striking in punishment for ever—by their hot breath, they wanted to pass on to the skies the fire of torments and sufferings, the yearning of poor hearts for happiness and a sure piece of bread, and in the meantime down below where the tired people stood, their strength running out, cries for help and wailing were mingling with the howl of the wind, with the predatory roar celebrating the triumph of the monster."⁶⁷

This pagan frenzy, the rule of a monster of the world, is a consequence of the losing of God. Yushkevich ends his work with an image leaning towards symbolism, the spiritual core of which, setting the heavenly and the earthly, evil and divine, against each other, is itself closely related to the intellectual

66 Yushkevich, S.: "Raspad," *Knizhki Voskhoda* 3 (1902), pp. 28, 29.

67 Ibid., pp. 35.

trends of the end of the 19th and the early 20th century, the “silver age” of Russian literature.

Falling Apart is a story on a Jewish theme able to convey a much more general (Russian and universal) message. It is about Jewry at the end of the century, about the economical and psychological transformation of the end of the century and its changing value system. And it is also about man, family, love and hate, sacrifice and crime resulting in loneliness. *Falling Apart* was a start of a career to which Yushkevich was not always able to come up later. Its significance beyond Jewish literature remained unrecognized in its own time, and so it remains up to this day.

The main topics of Yushkevich's work at the time (*The Taylor*, *Ita Haine*, *Pity*, *Our Father*) were misery, poverty and suffering. Even though he was concentrating on social ills, all kinds of incendiary pathos or revolutionary ideas are absent from these works. According to Khodasevich, Yushkevich's fundamental approach is compassion, and when he chooses children and women for his main protagonists, he does so because he wants to choose the most defenceless even among the weak and the suffering. Another sociological aspect of the disintegration of the family, female destiny is exposed in *Ita Haine*, which describes the misery of mothers leaving their babies, women serving as wet nurses in the city, and their children growing up wild, almost like animals. A similarly depressing but even more typical turn-of-the-century theme is the life of prostitutes portrayed first in the pages of *Our Sisters* and later on in *Street*. The latter, according to Khodasevich, already belongs to the third period.

Street (1911?) is set in Odessa, and one of its “main characters” is Deribovskaya Street, the famous main street of the city, which can also be regarded as one of the meanings of the title. The broad, luxurious avenue lined with shops, a passage-store, an Opera and taverns was shown in an entirely different light in a story born a few years earlier, in Kipen's *In October* (1905), where it was a scene of the events of the pogrom. In his description of Deribovskaya Street, Yushkevich first heaps on verbs, then nouns, first introducing people, then shop windows and buildings in the middle of the story.⁶⁸ In the last chapter, the street (a noun whose grammatical gender is female in Russian) is simply called by the pronoun “she,” thus becoming an autonomous being living a life of its own in the end. Individuals no longer matter. The street dominating the city takes on a female character; it is as feminine as the

68 Yushkevich, S.: *Ulitsa*, *Moskovskoie knigoizdatelstvo*, 1911, p. 43.

girls walking its pavement, destroying their lives in the process of *flânerie*. (Yushkevich has a penchant for one-word nominal titles like *Hunger*, *Money*, *In a City*, *Miserere*, *Street*, or personal names: *Ita Haine*, *Mendel Spivak*, *Inn-Keeper Heiman*, *Leon Drei*.)

Street is simply about a fourteen-year-old girl who becomes a prostitute because that is her only hope for a better life. Her name is Sonya, and her pure character conjures up, if for a moment, memories of the Sonya of *Crime and Punishment*. At her first examination, the Madame, too, seems to try to test at all cost whether she is pure, neat and honest, as if those features were proper conditions of this particular employment. Yushkevich goes well beyond the stereotype of poverty driving girls to prostitution, and gives a far deeper psychological insight. Unnoticed, the narrator penetrates the thoughts of his characters, and, even though speaking in the third person, he lets the world being seen and commented on pass through their eyes and their experiences, giving thereby a profound view also of the characters themselves. Sonya sees the life of the older girls around her as the only possible way out of the misery and the filth, the yard filled with quarrels, curses and fights, out of the Jewish quarter. The formula is simple: Jewish mothers are happy to have their daughters use their body to make a living, because that means enough money, and they are even ready to help them as procurers. It is an unwritten rule that the boys providing protection and taking a part of the money also move into the girl's house, virtually taking it over as omnipotent masters. The pimps soon get tired of the exhausted girls, begin to beat them, and then leave them on their own.

Sonya wants to be different. Thrilled by maturing and becoming a woman, she is interested in men, nice dresses, tempted by the shop windows, and feels that when walking on Deribasovskaya, she is part of a higher-class world herself. Looked at from here, from the perspective of the glittering street awash in light at night, it is the depressing world at home that may appear strange and unreal. The first customer makes her stomach turn, but the feeling of independence, of being able to make money is intoxicating, and she does not see any other way for it. Yushkevich gives the reader an idea of the process whereby 20th century big-city life evolved with narrow corridors opening up between the outskirts and the centre of town. The poor living on the edges levitate toward the affluent inner city, degrading it, while the role of the family home is being transformed with the appearance of large crowds of people looking for momentary relief and fun in the inns, taverns and streets. Upright citizens taking an evening stroll with their families may easily run into girls of whom they are regular customers. Yushkevich's story shows that Sonya, who

wanted to be different, ends up going the same way as others before her, being sucked in by this milieu. The model she wanted to follow was that of sixteen-year-old Tsilya, who, in reality, invited and helped Sonya only because she wanted that others should not stay respectable either. Tsilya has a clear picture of what awaits her from the very start: "She would have liked to have the future got over with as fast as possible. Let Benya's love for her go away, he would be certain to leave her anyway; let all the troubles pass, the 'house' [older prostitutes, who could no longer make a living in the street would move into the brothels], old age, loneliness, the last illness, the end."⁶⁹ Tsilya kills herself, the girls get venereal disease, then pulmonary consumption, some are stabbed to death by their lovers or the other way round, and lovers are exchanged. Sonya is also caught up in the vicious circle, and she is left at the moment of the first turn of the wheel by the author whose message was only that no one can remain pure and uncorrupted in a milieu of this kind.

The names of Yushkevich's Odessa characters—Benya Akermansky, Zunya Moldovan—may remind the reader of Babel's *Odessa Stories*, but this is not the same legendary, refined and elegant Jewish underworld but a miserable *lumpen* underclass not in the least different from the non-Jewish underworld, one which nobody would recall with nostalgia. There is nothing specifically Jewish about this world which is in danger of disappearing (unlike in the works of Babel), and is likely to live on and be reproduced, regardless whether it has any Jewish features or none.

Yushkevich is quite capable of being emotional, but emotional in a peculiar, unique way. He wrote no larger work about the pogrom. His brief, few pages long story, *Our Father*, which does not treat the events of the pogrom either, only some of its indirect consequences, like in a microcosm. The genre picture made of a Jewish family is photographic; the characters are distinguished by one or two prominent features; the rest is to be put together or guessed by the reader. The father shares his sadness with others in the inn, and when he goes home, he is awaited by countless children. One is prone to illness, the other oversensitive, the third a gambler, and the fifth is dying because he was hit in the head by a stone during the pogrom. A crucifix had been hung in his neck, and he was even taught "Our Father, who art in heaven....," but it all failed. He still keeps repeating "Our Father" in his feverish dreams... That is the whole story. Yushkevich presents the reader with a single big oxymoron. One of its elements is the framework constituted by the

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

prayer "Our Father" appearing in the title and in the story's last words, while the other is the misery and bloody cruelty in-between, which are incongruous with the spirit of those words. It is hard to tell which is more paradoxical: a Jewish Lord's Prayer or the "Christian" mass murder.

Yushkevich mentions the pogrom in his play *King* (*Korol'*, 1905), but it happens far from the capitalist Goldmann's family house. Goldmann expresses his opinion that anti-Semitism is provoked by the behavior of Jews. In *The Hunger* (Golod, 1905) it is only formulated in the author's instructions: "October evening. Groups of people pass behind the window in the street." In *Miserere* the dominant phenomena of Jewish poverty is repeated—hunger, ill children, unemployment, everywhere the existential *sac-de-cul*.

The only novel by Yushkevich that contains a direct description of a pogrom is *Evrei*, published in 1906 in the Collected Works of Yushkevich (at Znaniie, 3rd volume). This last scene is so expressionistic, that in the first publication in Russia this closing chapter was omitted. The ending scene is cathartic because the principal hero, under the influence of the pogrom, changes his philosophy of assimilation, joins his "brothers" and dies with them. Here we see the same pattern of "returning to the poor, weak and vulnerable" as in Kipen's *In October* (1905).

Later a play was also written under the same title *Evrei*. David Vygodsky gave a cutting critique of Yushkevich's play *Evrei* when it was produced on stage in Gomel in 1918 (in Narodnii Dom). He said it was concentrated overtly on one topic, tendentious, schematic and lacking in any artistic qualities.⁷⁰

The scene at the end of *Evrei* is very similar to any other description of the pogrom, which is why it merits closer examination.⁷¹ We are in a closed space, a room that was a home to the family, but now the closeness of intimacy is cruelly broken and it becomes a cage, a trap. Cruel penetration through doors is accompanied by the crashing noise of the doors, glass, frames, furniture and cries of neighbors. Yushkevich here uses the phonetic affects of the language and the gradual increase of tension caused by the enumeration of broken things, which is how the scene tends to expressionism. This penetration fore-

70 "Napisannaia na temu", "grubo tendentsioznaia, naskvoz' tematichnaia – ne obladaiaushchaia nikakimi khudozhestvennymi dostoinstvami". 11 OR RNB F. 1169b, ed.hr. 216, L. 104. Reference made by Kelner V. E. *K istorii nesbyvshikhsa nadezhd. Neopublikovannye knigi v fonde D. Vygodskogo v Otdele Rukopisei Rossiiskoi natsionalnoi biblioteki*. http://judaica.spb.ru/artcl/a12/vygotsky_r.shtml

71 Yushkevich, S.: *Sobranie sochinenii* 3rd volume, 1906. 164–169.

shadows the other “breaking in,” a penetration in the most intimate sense, the violation of the young bride, Meira.

Broken heads and bones are mentioned in the same way as broken things are—human voices are no more human. Yushkevich does not allow himself any expressions of emotion until the last page of the novel. There he asks a question that can not be answered: “Who could defend them?” There he says that the town is damned, and “sacred, bloody rain was pouring down on the earth. And it was poured innocently.” However, pathos is present in the exclamations of Sima, the mother. Three generations are present in the room, the weak are represented by elderly people, children and women.

With the ellipsis ending the last sentence of the novel Yushkevich reflects the impossibility of saying anything more. Language is powerless when tragedy happens, and Yushkevich wants to be anything but pathetic. He does not give any analytical description either, but definitely makes the reader think and take a position through some surprising expressions. E.g. “invented or fabricated hatred” evidently bespeaks his position that anti-Semitism is something given to the people by some external manipulation, to make them set fire to the pogromists.

The poetic power of Yushkevich’s pogrom scene is granted by “estrangement” (term by Shklovsky, *ostraneniie*), some unusual, not typical elements: the infiltrating irrational visions of Nakhman (“a bear, a bird, a fly” appears before him after the first, big hit on his head) that do not let him think as before. The most shocking scene is, however, when the old woman, Sima tries to interfere in the violation of her daughter, Meira. With blood pouring from her head, she caresses both the girl, whom she is consoling, and the red shirted carpenter on top of her, trying to draw his attention away and proposing herself instead of her daughter. The last embarrassing moment is when the violator kills his last victim, the violated girl, out of lust, and despite the fact that she, as everybody else in the room is dead, she still attracts him, and he cannot leave. “Her high, naked breast stared him in the eyes, and he, without understanding what happened to him, cuddled up to her passionately.”⁷² The double effect of this gesture is, first, to show suddenly in this bestial man something deeply human that makes him also a victim of hatred, and by juxtaposition, to make it clear to the reader that all the bestial acts were committed by human beings, not faceless machines.

⁷² Ibid. 168.

All pieces written by Yushkevich in the third creative period were born in the shadow of the long but unfinished novel *Leon Drei*. The author began to write it in 1907, publishing three volumes before the end of his life. (The first volume appeared in 1908, the second in 1913 and the third in 1919.)⁷³ Leon Drei is a negative main character, a "negative hero," who hurt the feelings of all Jews completely. According to Khodasevich, they thought that Yushkevich considered all Jews to be like that. Characteristically enough, by that time the author had grown distant from the *Znaniie* circle hallmarked by the name of Gorky, as if he had thought that the vision of the world based on the class aspects were too narrow for him. Rich and poor are all shown variably as happy and miserable, good and evil, and Leon Drei is one of the latter, a crook, depraved and cowardly, a leader only among those of his ilk. Yushkevich's novel narrates the fantastic rise of Leon Drei. He really comes from a Jewish milieu because that was the world the author knew best (see the above cited article by Tsinberg), but Yushkevich does not treat the Jewish environment in the same way as An-sky the ethnographer or Aizman the realist, but in an appropriate artistic form which, in the case of *Leon Drei*, is the grotesque. He takes the cynical maxim that only corruption and baseness can help you get by to its absurd extreme. Anyone who does not keep to this rule will die and appear to be Leon's victim (like Melnikov's seduced wife who jumps out of the window). There are perhaps three people who are not depraved but happy, however, they are "poor in spirit" or, as Khodasevich calls them, *iurodivii*.⁷⁴ They are allowed to be happy because they have dropped out of this world. Those who stay inside cannot be happy. Saul Rozen is estranged from life because he is a poet. His sister Judith is gone crazy because of all the novels she read; it is as if she had escaped into books. Esther, their younger sister takes care of them with humility... Saul's wife, Anna Rozen, reads the French novel, *The Lie*. Her very name predestines the happy housewife to become, as a small-time Donna Anna, a lover of this unscrupulous Don Juan, that is, one beside the other four.

Leon Drei is on a hunt for money and a rich woman from the very start. He begins with petty boasting, and is blown up to the point where he puts himself above god. This is the way he thinks about himself: "I can have the globe for

⁷³ In 1922, the three volumes of *Leon Drei* were about to be published in Moscow. The book was printed in the printing house of the Christian Youth Organization. When the Organization learned about this, it bought up every single copy and burned them.

⁷⁴ Half-wits, madmen or simpletons worshipped as saints in medieval Russia.

myself. I am a genius." "It's a pity my advice wasn't sought when the world was created." "Just go on serving me, God...," he says when he is afraid of getting syphilis. "All right, God, you get a four plus. When you deserve a five, then you'll get it."

Leon Drei has a line of distinguished predecessors in Russian literature, from among whom Khodasevich points to Khlestakov (from Gogol's *The Inspector General*) but he might just as well mention Chichikov (*Dead Souls*). Just as Gogol's Khlestakov boasts of his familiarity with Pushkin, Leon Drei also fancies himself as highly knowledgeable about matters of art including Pushkin: "Pushkin is all right, except for rhythm." Like Khlestakov, he also lectures people with banalities: "a good beating serves a woman well"; "A servant is a second mother," and so on. In the last pages of the third volume Leon goes to visit the lawyer Melnikov, the husband of his one-time lover, in whose house he also lived for a while. Melnikov's wife killed herself because of Leon. Similarly to Khlestakov, Leon also has plans to seduce their daughter, still a grammar-school student. Who knows what is more bizarre, to seduce mother and daughter together, like Khlestakov did, or to make love to a dead lover's daughter, moreover in the home of the widowed husband, on the one-time conjugal bed, when the father of the girl is also at home?⁷⁵ Other theatrical reminiscences also arise in the scene: the repeated call "swear!" seems to refer to Hamlet where the motif of lascivious seduction also plays a role. And what a grotesque, comic paraphrase it is of the scene involving the spirit of Hamlet's dead father that in both scenes, the oath is taken on a weapon. It is, of course, a sword in Hamlet, but in *Leon Drei* it is a gun hidden in a trouser pocket—and it is, in fact, not even a gun; all Leon has in his pocket is a briefcase... so the girl's hand must be unmistakably feeling something else there. Yushkevich uses the interpretation of the gun quite concretely as a phallic symbol.

Leon's close relative is Dudka, the protagonist of a story, also unfinished, with the same title (1919). He is a newly rich snob, who buys the house of Repin, the famous Russian painter, and is only interested in Russian women.

⁷⁵ The scene oddly anticipates Nabokov's *Lolita*. In that novel, too, the mother of the girl whom Humbert Humbert has designs on, dies. It is an interesting fact that Yushkevich belonged to the circle of friends of Milyukov in emigration (see the events of Yushkevich's funeral later on), while Nabokov's father was the deputy of Milyukov, the president of the Cadet Party. He died during an attempt on Milyukov's life in Berlin; he saw the assassin taking aim at Milyukov at the party convention, and jumped in front of him, catching the bullet.

It is noted with some surprise by everybody who ever wrote about Yushkevich that towards the end of his life, he abandoned Jewish themes. My opinion is that this possibility was inherent already in his earliest works. He did not pass into the Russian middle class, as would be assumed by many, but emigrant life and the changing of the "life matter" he directly observed took him closer to the more universal aspects of literature and, on the other hand, he himself moved on, beyond the mimetic representation of reality. Yushkevich was probably looking for new themes rather than newer possibilities of form, thus breaking away from the previous works. Still, this break is not as sharp as it may have appeared to the contemporary observer, since, as we have seen, his entire oeuvre was aimed towards a broader horizon from the first story on. It is typical that at Yushkevich's funeral in Paris,⁷⁶ both Milyukov, the president of the Cadet Party, and Sholem Asch made speeches, the former in Russian, the latter in Yiddish. Among other things, Milyukov said: "Yushkevich had a special place in Russian literature. He was a mediator between the Russian intelligentsia and the world he wrote about. Yushkevich had always been a Russian writer, and that is what he will remain, and it may not be altogether needless to say this again." In the volume published posthumously in 1933 (which was titled after his last work, the unfinished *Seven Days*), the same thought is emphasized by the author of the essay discussing the topic Semyon Yushkevich and the Jews with a fine paradox: the writer had no domicile in Petersburg, and could only get to the premiers of his own plays with great difficulty, however, he won permanent domicile for Jews in Russian literature. In Yushkevich's works, he writes, Jewry appeared in its totality, with everything and all the kinds of things in them, because for Yushkevich, Jewry was not just an ethnographic curiosity, and this may well have been the reason why Jews accused him of anti-Semitism. On the other hand, in his obituary written a month after Yushkevich's death, Boris Zaitsev emphasized that Yushkevich was an organic but "regional" writer, a writer of the Russian South; as the writer himself often told him and Bunin: "Good for you; you are the children of Moscow but I come from Odessa. You have a huge literature behind your back, and the wonderful instrument of the Russian language."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ The funeral was attended by Russian celebrities like Ivan Bunin, Mark Aldanov, Khodasevich, Margulies, Milyukov, Maklakov, Lev Shestov, Arkadii Sliozberg, Boris Zaitsev, Mikhail Struve, Yasha Heifetz, Nina Berberova, Mark Visnyak, Sholem Asch and others. See: *Poslednie Novosti* 2156, 16 February 1927.

⁷⁷ Zaitsev, B.: "S. S. Yushkevich (1869–1927)," *Sovremennyye zapiski* XXXI (1927), pp. 391–4.

Yushkevich who, as it was universally thought at the time of his death, would have deserved a distinguished place in two cultures and two literatures at the same time, ended up having no place in any at all; he is not remembered by literary history either. Instead of dual attachment, he also became totally unattached, stuck in a no-man's land between the two cultures, and shunned by both.

Pogrom in literature: strategies between the documentarian and the emotional approach

In literature, the changes are represented by a shifting of thematic focuses to new ones. Progress is portrayed through conflicts between the generations, those of the "fathers" and the "sons" (Yaroshevsky), religious tradition and folk customs are shown as defense against oblivion (Ben-Ami and the ethnographic stylizations of An-sky); the assimilated intellectual with a double identity (Naumov-Kogan) is a precursor of the typical hero of the 20th century (Babel). After 1900 the Jewish hero of Russian-Jewish literature is no longer attached to religious traditions, and writers who aim to show the Jewish tradition, replace religion with the family by speaking of it as the basic value of Jewry—and interpret its destruction as a sign of the vanishing of Judaism (Yushkevich). Kipen is the first to establish the character of the physically strong Jew in Russian-Jewish literature. This new character is meant to replace the stereotype of the perennially apologetic, fearful, weak Jew. Problems associated with emigration take on highly specific dimensions in Russian-Jewish literature: the duality of the émigré becomes even more ambiguous because of a paradoxical "homesickness" for Russia, the "homeland," where Russian Jewry was born, but from where it was expelled by pogroms.

When investigating a topic like "pogrom in literature," a literary historian would feel professionally obliged to start working by collecting information from studies in history, sociology, statistics, geography, folklore, ethnography, demography, archival documents, diaries, contemporary journals, newspapers, reports and other documents. On the other hand, when research is being done on the same topic by historians or scholars of sociology, demography etc., it is highly unlikely that they will pick up novels or short stories to gather information from literary texts. The methodological reasons are clear: what writers put down in their works is fiction, not fact, reality is not reported, but recre-

ated in literary works in a special way. This relationship between reality and fiction is considered by researchers of these academic fields as "rupture," so they feel they can never rely on, or cite facts from, literary works. My suggestion—and one of the main purposes of my book—is to discover how literary fiction reflects the general atmosphere and tendencies of the time in models, patterns and re-structured reality; because the facts represent only one side of reality. The other side, no less important in my view, is how history is remembered, how it is etched on the minds of those who experienced it.

It is interesting to see not only what kinds of reactions to the pogroms were registered by literature but also the size and amount of those reactions, because they reveal the influence of a pogrom on the public opinion of the times. Generally speaking, the one which took place in 1905 was the first pogrom which appeared widely in literature (all prose works mentioned below were written in 1906, and published in 1906 or 1907.) Despite the fact that the 1881–1882 pogroms had a much greater effect on Jewish thinking—they represented a watershed in the Jewish strategy of assimilation—the only writer who directly depicted the events in fiction was Sergei Iaroshevsky. Iaroshevsky was a forerunner but not a well-known author, his oeuvre was published exclusively in *Voskhod* between 1882 and 1893. One of the changes was that works dealing with the 1905 pogrom were no longer published in Jewish periodicals but in separate volumes: An-sky in *New Winds*, 1907; and in his own complete works or in Russian journals like Aizman's *The Heart of Being* in the sixteenth volume of Gorky's *Znaniie*, or Kipen's *In October* (1905) in the eleventh volume of *Znaniie* in 1906. The type of "stylistic" strategy followed by the authors is also important to see. Iaroshevsky was a realist, even a documentarist. He tried to show typical persons in their typical conditions and conflicts as widely as he could (Jews trying to organize emigration to Palestine with the help of the Russian Government, Jews stealing money from the Palestine fund, etc.). The problem of documentarism in literature raises another general theoretical question: how to insert raw information into fiction without destroying the literary forms, what methods of narration are appropriate and best suited for the impression the writer wants to make on his readers. What is more important for a writer, his moral duty to convey a direct message or to invent a new artistic language, how to shock the reader, emotionally or intellectually?

The 1905 pogroms were depicted by the use of different stylistic strategies. Aizman's *The Heart of Being* employs metaphors, pathetic rhetoric and surrealist images. Kipen relies on description, detailed but not dry, involving elements of meticulous psychological observation and also pathos. Aizman (in

the *Flood of Blood*) uses pathos and expressionist enumeration full of tension along with laconic lists of horrors. This complexity of approach was first considered by many authors in Jewish literature after 1905. That date is very important because this problem, unfortunately, would remain the main issue later on for those who decided to write on the Shoah, and not to keep silent after Auschwitz. The 1905 pogroms turned out to be a tragic dress rehearsal for the scene in literature.

IV. “MOTHERLAND” AND “CEMETERY”— CLIMAX AND ENDGAME

Concerning 1917, it is a matter of debate between historians whether the turn of events of 7 November should really be regarded as a revolution or, as some maintain, a mere unfortunate incident, or a simple *coup d'état*. As a dividing line between historical epochs, 1917 brought no immediately noticeable changes into the continuum of Russian culture (if only for the reason of artistic oeuvres reaching from one era into the next); the radical changes set in following the period of the great chaos (the Civil War and War Communism), in the 1920s. Like every major upheaval in Russia, it was accompanied by pogroms, especially during the Civil War, the chaotic events of which took place precisely in the region of the former Pale of Settlement.¹

In literary history, in my opinion, the label “the twenties” covers the period between 1917 and 1929. The absolute closing date is the year of the 1st Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934, bringing to an ultimate end the lively, varied and colourful culture, infinitely freer than in the 1930s, which went along with the regime change.² It cannot be doubted in no other time did politics intervene as directly in people’s private lives and enforce the same direct command over culture—modelled on the management of the economy—as in these

1 In 1919, pogroms went on all year long. Pogroms were perpetrated by the White Guards, the Petliurists, the 1st Cavalry of the Red Army and a variety of guerrilla forces, all in the name of their own ideologies, or simply continuing the old Cossack-Khaidamak “tradition” of pillaging. Isaac Babel also wrote about the pogroms in his diary. *1920 Diary—Isaac Babel*, ed. C. Avins, trans. H. T. Wilets, 1995.

2 An introduction of the Russian literature and the fate of authors of the 1920s and 30s is outside the scope of this work. As opposed to the colourful and fertile 1920s, the 30s were already characterized by an increasingly centralized culture and growing terror. Writers were frightened and silenced by the terror, and the majority were also physically annihilated.

years. This is also the reason why we need to illustrate the character of the age by describing certain events whose investigation from the aspect of Jewish culture could begin only in the 1990s.

The issue of “Jewish revolutionaries”

The involvement of Jews in the revolution represents a highly sensitive area in historical studies. One of the newer pretexts used to justify anti-Semitism in Russia (and East Europe) is the stereotype that all the 20th century Russian revolutions which turned the world upside down were “the work of Jews” or at least took place under their “direction.” (This “assumption” is only one step removed from the vision of Jewish conspiracy for “world dominance” and the paranoid world of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.) More recent investigations are trying to find scientific answers based on solid evidence and free from prejudice to these questions. The principal trend in this research is to employ a variety of historical sources and to rely on the statistical figures deducible from them.

Warnings about the threat of “Jewish revolutionaries” were raised by Monarchist Russian historians already after the murder of the Tsar in 1881, although at that time the list of the internal enemies of the empire was led by the Poles. By the turn of the century, however, this situation changed, and the Poles were pushed to the background. The participation of Jews in the revolutionary movements was far from massive, nevertheless, Jews made up one sixth to one third of the membership of parties and illegal organizations, a ratio far higher than their ratio in the population. The reason was simple: due to assimilation, an increasing number of Jews, broken away from their original environment and living in grave difficulties, were seeking for a solution for their problems and a place in society. At the turn of the century 30 per cent of the political prisoners were Jewish, and 15–19 per cent of SRs,³ and 30 per cent of the deputies at the 1907 London Congress of Russian social democrats were of Jewish origin.⁴ These ratios, however, fail to show how small the total number of these people was in comparison to the whole Jewish population of Russia. This becomes clear when we also consider that the Russian

3 Naimark, N.: “Terrorism and the Fall of Imperial Russia,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 2, 1990, p. 174.

4 Shapiro, L.: “The Role of the Jews in the Russian Revolutionary Movement,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 15 (1961), p. 160.

Social Democratic Party had a total of 8400 members at the beginning of 1905, but not even the Bund, the Jewish socialist organization, had more than 34 thousand members—and after the Russian revolution of 1905–1907, that membership was reduced to a mere two thousand.⁵

But above all the question must be raised as to how far these revolutionaries should be considered as Jews, an aspect which would become critical later on, in connection with the character of subsequent, well-known revolutionaries. It would gain special importance after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new regime change, when "those responsible for the destruction of Russia" would be sought without any inhibition or obstacle, internal or external.

The problem of revolutionary Jews was raised already in 1917 in a speech by Simon Dubnow: "...many demagogues came from among us, who joined the heroes of the street and the prophets of power grabbing. They use Russian pseudonyms because they are ashamed of their Jewish origin (Trotsky, Zinoviev, etc.), but maybe it is their Jewish name which is not genuine, because they have no roots to bind them to our people."⁶ At the same time Dubnow notes with some satisfaction that few Jews are taking part in the revolution. Writing in the summer of 1917, he meant the February revolution resulting in the declaration of national and religious equality in March 1917 by the Temporary Government, thus enacting the emancipation of Jews. Those of Jewish origin active in leftist politics abandoned their Jewish roots almost without exception, the majority actually denying it (by converting to Christianity, renouncing their religion, and often cutting their ties even to their relatives as well).⁷ When measured against the three aspects of my hypothesis mentioned in the introduction—religious, national and religious affiliation—Bolsheviks of Jewish origin can hardly be regarded as Jews at all. Exposing the facts and examining the problems of identity in the light of these facts is the job of historians and a variety of fellow disciplines. It is certain, though, that a review of the literary sources also provides important evidence, to which this book also wishes to contribute.⁸

5 Budnitskii, O.: "V chuzhom piru pokhmelie. Evreii i russkaia revoliutsiia," *Vestnik Evreiskogo Universiteta v Moskve* 3 (1996), p. 22.

6 Dubnow, S.: *Kniga zhizni*, t. 2, 1935, p. 227. Quoted by Budnitskii, p. 25.

7 According to Budnitskii, the abandoning of Judaism does not mean the end of belonging to Jewry; in his view on such a basis the Russian revolutionaries would not be Russians either, having abandoned Orthodox Christianity. He believes that the reason for the overrepresentation of Jews in the revolution was the hopeless legal and social oppression characterizing the position of Jews.

8 A multitude of important ideas and information can be found in autobiographies and in confessional essays involving autobiographical elements. See for example Georg Lukács: *My*

A long forgotten feature, recognized anew, of the openness and wish of Jews for change was their Messianic expectation of revolution at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries which, in Eastern Europe and especially in Russia, was shared by other groups as well. Slogans derived from Socialist ideas appeared in the guise of prophecies, and it is most important to be aware that via newspapers and works of literature, these ideas, or more precisely, their expressions moulded into religious terminology, were very wide spread, and not only among philosophers or members of the intelligentsia given to philosophical speculation. "God is us"; "the proletariat is the chosen people which will fulfill its mission and complete history"; "the destitute proletariat was nothing—it will be everything"; "the promised land, Paradise on earth, Communistic egalitarianism and world peace are equal to redemption"; "salvation is on earth"; "man is master of his fate"; these simple teachings carried the promise of a new religion, and this *ersatz* religion offered to Jews a more readily accessible road to assimilation than conversion to Christianity, a new spiritual and mental community of interest in which religion or ethnic origin played no part.⁹ The Messianic element had an important role not only in the revolutionary mood of assimilating Russian Jews but Russian religious thinking could also easily turn into the same direction. A reflection of this is manifest in high culture, in literature as well as in the renewing, profound religious philosophy at the turn of the century. Another, more vulgar variant was the theoretical system of "God-building" hallmarked by the name of Gorky and Lunacharsky, a positivist simplification of the Nietzschean "God-man." Man, taking his destiny in his own hand as a "New God," producing everything needed for the earthly Paradise "as a creator in his temple," offered a highly impressive theory even after the turning point of 1917, when even Gorky himself realized that the Bolshevik revolution was equal to seizing power by force.¹⁰ The conceivability of revolution was greatly enhanced by the apoca-

Road to Marx; Julian Strykowski's volume of interviews *Le Salut était à l'Est*; Ferenc Fejtő's *Le Dieu et son Juif*; Walter Benjamin's Moscow diary and confessions and many more books and articles.

⁹ I have investigated this eschatological aspect of the revolution in greater detail in Hetényi, Zs.: *Csillagosok—keresztesek. Mítosz és messianizmus Babel Lovashadseregében*, 1992; Hetényi, Zs.: "Razmyshleniia o roli ekhatologicheskikh chaianii v Rossii okolo 1917 goda," *Russies. Mélanges offerts à Georges Nivat pour son soixantième anniversaire*, eds. A. Dykman, J.-Ph. Jaccard. Lausanne, L'Age d'Homme, 1995, pp. 93–100.

¹⁰ Gorky, M.: *Nesvoievremennyye mysli i rassuzhdeniia o revoliutsii i o kul'ture. (1917–1918 gg.)*, 1990. N.B. the date of publishing—these essays were forbidden during Soviet times. A selection of essays were published in English in *Untimely Thoughts: Essays on Revolution, Culture and the Bolsheviks, 1917–1918*, trans., introduced and notes by H. Ermolaev, 1968.

lyptic atmosphere of the World War, the anticipation of catastrophe and the Final Days, the tangible proximity of these and the utopian contents of Socialist ideas.¹¹ In the years following the revolution, during the Civil War, pogroms increased in number,¹² but these were still not the signs of the Soviet state anti-Semitism that was to come later.

"De-Judaization" and "Yiddishization"

How would the fate of Russian-Jewish culture develop in Soviet Russia? The series of events which took place tells all. On 23 January 1918 a decree was issued declaring the separation of state from church and education from church. This law hurt all churches, but for religious Jews it was a genuine disaster, because it shook the very foundations of the Jewish way of schooling, developed especially for passing on Judaism, a centuries-old tradition, lifestyle and way of thinking, which accompanied the young Jewish generations from 4–5 years of age till young adulthood. In 1919, *kehillas* (religious communities) were closed down, as were the *yeshivas* and *cheders* in 1922–1923. Along with the general attack on Judaism, the violent elimination of Zionism was also completed. The Zionist groups were wiped out in armed raids by the political police: the Bund and the organization Poalei Zion were banned, and some 3600 people arrested and deported until 1925.¹³ The main leaders of this struggle against Judaism were, paradoxically, the Jewish sections, the so-called *Evspektzii* established within the Bolshevik Party, which also employed the methods of "mass agitation": among other things, they staged "social tribunals" where the "culprit"—the Jewish religion (Kiev, 1921), the *cheder*

11 On this, see: Scholem, G.: *Toward an Understanding. The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, 1971. (The same with a new foreword by A. Hertzberg, 1995.) First and original edition: "Zum Verständnis der messianischen Idee im Judentum," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 28 (1959), pp. 193–239. See also: Löwy, M.: "Messianisme juif et utopies libertaires en Europe centrale (1905–1923)," *Archives des Sciences sociales des religions* 51/1 (1981), pp. 5–47. Löwy defines three fundamental types of Jews joining the revolutionary movements on the grounds of Messianism.

12 Gusev-Orenburgsky, S. I.: *Kniga o evreiskikh pogromakh na Ukraine v 1919 g. Sostavlena po ofitsial'nym dokumentam, dokladam i mestnim oprosam postradavshikh*, ed. and Epilog by M. Gorky, 1921. Reprinted 1972.

13 Shkol'nikova, E.: *Transformatsiia evreiskogo mestechka v SSSR v 1930-e gody* (preprint), 1998, p. 11.

(Vitebsk) the *yeshiva* (Rostov) and the custom of circumcision (Kharkov, 1928)¹⁴—was sentenced in a mock trial. The *Evseksii* functioned till 1930.¹⁵

In the twenties even the language problem was taken, as it were, out of the hands of the Jewish communities by the authorities, and turned into a political issue. An attack was launched against the Hebrew language. In the spirit of all-Soviet nationality policy and ideological dictatorship, the language of the holy texts of Judaism were not allowed a place among the languages of the Soviet Union: Hebrew speech would have strengthened the self-awareness and Zionist tendencies of Jewish communities and the preservation of their religion and customs. At the beginning of the twenties the writers and poets writing in Hebrew—Byalik, Saul Chernikhovsky and a dozen others—left the country. In 1926 the Hebrew Habima theatre chose not to return from a tour in Western Europe. Hebrew was never banned officially, but the number of books published in Hebrew declined rapidly. In the 1930s only religious books were published, distributed to synagogues and families, and in the end, only calendars showing the holidays were made in Hebrew.¹⁶ The anti-religion campaign announced at the end of the twenties, in April 1929 brought an anti-church law according to which religious communities were no longer allowed to operate hospitals, libraries and cooperatives, from where it took just a single step to close the synagogues, convert them into warehouses and garages, demolish them in some instances, and deprive religious people adhering to religious functions of their rights. (The right to education for their children, to medical service, to ration cards etc. The majority of Orthodox Christian and other churches suffered the same fate.) The last few years have seen an upswing in research into this process, and a mapping out of the remnants is going on.¹⁷

With the battle against Judaism and Zionism, Soviet ideology attempted to destroy two of the three elements of Jewish identity: the religious and the na-

14 Rothenberg, J.: "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union," *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*, London, 1917, pp. 161-2; Gitelman, Z.: *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*, 1972, p. 301.

15 The participation of "Jews" in the Soviet state organs is discussed—although without defining on what basis they should be regarded as Jews, or with no consideration paid to the fact that many were Jewish only by "blood," and not by cultural affiliation and identity—by Krichevskii, L.: "Evreii v apparate VChK-OGPU v 20-e gody," *Evreii i russkaia revoliutsiia*, 1999.

16 In the late Soviet period, the Jewish samizdat was increased from the fifties on by Hebrew textbooks. See Sisels, I.: "Evreiskii samizdat v 1960-70-e gody," *Yehupets* 6 (2000), pp. 356-86.

17 *Istoriia evreiev na Ukraine i Belorussii, Ekspeditsii, pamiatniki, nakhodki*. Compiled by V. M. Lukin, B. N. Khaimovich, V. A. Dymshits, edited by V. A. Dymshits, 1994.

tional. The latter was downgraded and simplified into a nationality, while the third sphere, the cultural, was supported, although in a rather peculiar way. Above all, it deprived Jewish culture of its traditions and also what may be called the civilizational element: the fundamentals of its lifestyle, and attempted to create a new, socialist (specifically Soviet) Jewish culture. The supported language of this remained Yiddish, regarded simply as the language of the Jewish nationality in the administrative transformation announced in 1923 under the name *korenizatsiia* (*koren* = "root"), which was aimed at having the various offices operate in the language of the local population in the multinational Soviet Union and its administrations (in the case of Yiddish the region where minorities were settled). "Yiddishization" brought about courts, soviets, trade unions, party cells and schools operating in Yiddish. In 1926 in the Ukraine and Belarus, half of the Jewish children studied in Yiddish schools, a total of 54 thousand children in 366 schools in 1924, and 130 thousand children in 1100 schools in 1929.¹⁸ Several Yiddish publishing houses were active, the best known of which, Emes in Moscow, functioned till its closing down in 1948.¹⁹ An analysis of Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union would require special research.

The question may be asked: what considerations led Jews not aspiring to full assimilation, namely Jewish writers and poets, to the acceptance of Soviet ideology even when its totalitarian aspects began to emerge. When making our judgement, we must take into regard that this happened at a time when Europe had not yet recovered from the consequences of the Great Depression of 1929. The Soviet Union appeared in a certain sense as a socially balanced country, an island of peace compared to Europe, and it looked even more so with the spread of Fascism. In September 1931, Stalin made a statement that in the Soviet Union, active anti-Semitism may be actually punished with death. Until 1943, when Stalin issued his secret order that Jews must not hold positions of leadership, one could only speak about a veiled or indirect anti-Semitism (the tendency is apparent from the list of people executed during the waves of terror in the 1930s).

A peculiar development in the history of the twenties is the emergence of Jewish agricultural colonies, and later on, Jewish *kolkhozy*. The revival and

¹⁸ See Gitelman, op. cit.

¹⁹ Some statistical figures on books published in Yiddish: their number was 76 in 1926 and 668 in 1933, the latter meaning a total print run of 2.5 million copies. Newspapers: 21 in 1924, 40 in 1927, and 4 in 1930. The number of newspapers declined because they lost interest; their content was the same as papers in Russian. See Shkolnikova, op. cit.

spread of Jewish agricultural collectives was already observable at the beginning of the century when they represented a form of preparation for Zionist youths getting ready to move to, and find their place in, Palestine. The movement of the *chalutzim* in the twenties coincided with the Soviet idea of developing the agriculture and the introduction of cooperative farming. These collectives constituted the beginnings of the *kibbutz* movement in Palestine later on: the people fit for emigration were selected by a leadership. In 1924 the KOMZET (Committee for the Agricultural Relocation of Jewish workers) was established, whose aim was to send Jews to the uncultivated areas and settle them there. An auxiliary organization of KOMZET was OZET (Society for the Agricultural Relocation of Jewish workers), which assisted in the organization and realization of the work. The Jewish agricultural colonies were sometimes located far away from the former Pale, where, however, they had to cope with an environment as hostile as in their original settlements. Beside the natural migration and demographic transformation of the Jewish population, there was also a significant measure of government-controlled migration with the establishment of the Jewish Autonomous Territory of Birobidzhan (the resolution on relocation was brought in September 1933).²⁰

From the Yiddish novels born in the 1930s, much more can be learned about the life of Jewry, and especially about the transformation of the *shtetl*,²¹ the decline and disappearance of which became final with the annihilation of a large part of the Jewish population living in the German-occupied territories during World War II.²² The Yiddish-speaking communities vanished physically. Soviet authors writing in Yiddish were obliterated between 1948 and 1952 in Stalin's series of anti-Semitic actions, called euphemistically a campaign against "cosmopolitanism," and the atmosphere of general terror took care that even the rest should forget about or fall into deep silence about their one-time roots.

20 Abramsky, Sh.: "Birobidzhanskii proiekt 1927-1959," *Evreii v Sovetskoi Rossii (1917-1967)*, Jerusalem, 1975, pp. 107-25.

21 These novels were published also in Russian. Kulbak, M.: *Zelmenianer* [1937], 1960; Melamud, Kh.: *Khashchevatskiie rasskazy*, 1984.

22 On the transformation of the *shtetl*, see Shkolnikova, op. cit.

"There are Jews but there is no Jewish question..."

The struggle against anti-Semitism and Soviet anti-Semitism coexisted in the Soviet state in an odd symbiosis taking on peculiar forms which kept changing, and a feeling of uncertainty born of this paradox was one of the fundamental elements of a developing atmosphere of terror. One of the major elements that influenced how Jews felt in Russia was the noting of "Nationality" in the identity document introduced in 1932 (it was preceded by the introduction of unified Soviet citizenship in 1930). For obvious reasons this indication was seen entirely differently by a Georgian living in Georgia and brought up as a child of Georgian parents than by a Jew. The indication "Jewish" should be regarded as a violation of human rights in two respects: for one thing, as long as veiled or openly state-sponsored anti-Semitism exists, the note is equal to stigmatization. Second: Jews having given up their religion and aspiring to assimilation may have felt being pushed back into a narrow category unfit for them. It was in 1931, before the introduction of the ID card, that the proverb was born in literature—specifically in a novel by Ilf and Petrov—that "in the Soviet Union there are Jews, but there is no Jewish question."²³

In 1926 a campaign was launched against anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, involving a joint attempt by the Komsomol and the OGPU to find out how wide spread anti-Semitism was. Local secret observers reported on the general mood of the population, their reports serving as constituents of the top-secret document which provided the basis for a session and a resolution by the Komsomol (Resolution of the Fight against Anti-Semitism). The odd "survey" (or rather observation) conducted among workers, the unemployed, peasants, Soviet small-time bureaucrats, party members and the intelligentsia produced, much more than anything, a list of the old and new stereotypes of anti-Semitism.²⁴

Beside "popular" forms of anti-Semitism, also manifestations of "official" or government anti-Semitism began to appear. In the field of culture, this was noticeable mainly in the operation of censorship. Nothing escaped its attention. On the one hand, some books published earlier were banned—for instance, the volumes of the Safrut as well as Khodasevich's anthology of Jewish poets. Other books which also appeared earlier were bowdlerized, like Alek-

23 Ilf, I. and Petrov, J.: *The Golden Calf*, Part 3, Chapter 26. Chapter 27 includes an interesting reference to the history of the Wandering Jew as interpreted by Ostap Bender.

24 "Monarkhiia pogibla, antisemitizm ostalsa," Publikatsiia N. Teptsova *Neizvestnaia Rossiia—XX vek*, t. 3, Moscow, 1993, pp. 324–58.

sandr Kuprin's novel *Gambrinus* (1907) from which a paragraph on the pogrom was removed. *The Land of Shvambrania*, Lev Kassil's youth novel was "shortened" already in Soviet times: between 1930 and 1948, references to the Jewish origin of the child protagonist became very rare. On the other hand, works about to be published were banned. A book by the historian S. Borovoi, *17th-Century Jewish Chronicles*, was typeset and ready for printing when a new director was appointed to the head of the publishing house Sotsekgiz. He was watchful enough to immediately notice that the work "gives a one-side picture of the Ukrainian peasant movements by describing pogroms carried out by peasants, cholops and Cossacks." This highly vigilant director, the Hungarian Communist Béla Kun, soon left the publishing house, and a little after he was no longer among the living either.²⁵

A complete picture of Jewish culture in the Soviet era would also include a review of Russian works in which Jewish characters have a role, in whatever light. Morgulies, the intellectual who commits suicide in Valentin Kataev's "production novel" *Time, Forward!*, Levinson in A. Fadeyev's *The Nineteen*, or the Jewish partisan girl in M. Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* are such characters. To discuss this topic, however, would far exceed the scope of this book.²⁶ It was also in the twenties that the word "Jewish" itself began to be treated as taboo due to the increasingly sharp contradiction between the slogans of Socialism and the anti-Semitism characterising the Soviet Union, and the fear following from that contradiction. This lie underlined both classical forms of taboo. A taboo word is one that is forbidden to say or must be substituted with something else.²⁷ Both solutions are frequently encountered in Russian literature describing the Soviet era (especially in that produced after the change of the system), providing interesting analogues also as regards other

25 Blum, A.: "Hebrew Publications and the Soviet Censor in the 1920s," *East European Jewish Affairs* 1 (1993), pp. 91–100. See also: Blum, A.: "Evreiskaia tema glazami sovetskogo tsenzora," *Evreii v Rossii. Istoriia i kultura*, ed. D. A. Eliashevich, 1995; Blum, A. V.: *Evreiskii vopros pod sovietskoi tsenzuroi. 1917–1991*, 1996; Eliashevich, D.: "V sovetskom galute," *Evreiskii vopros pod sovietskoi tsenzuroi. 1917–1991*, 1996, pp. 5–22.

26 On this topic, see Friedberg, M.: "Jewish Themes in Soviet Russian Literature," *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*, ed. L. Kochan, 1970, 1972, 1978, pp. 197–216. This aspect is treated together, and inconsistently mixed, with various areas of Russian-Jewish literature and literature in Russian on Jewish topics by a recent bibliography: Kelner, V. and Eliashevich, D.: "Evrei v khudozhestvennoi literature na russkom iazyke," *Russian Studies* I/2 (1995), pp. 326–65.

27 Vladimir Voinovich compares the systems of taboo and euphemism on the word Jews with that on the word penis in his novel *Zamysel* (The Basic Idea). 1999. p. 141.

East European experience. The Russian-Jewish literature of the twenties was already affected by this development, and it also portrayed the emergence of the new forms of anti-Semitism (see chapters on Hekht and Kozakov).

In the 1920s, the Russian-Jewish writers of the previous period disappeared with an astounding rapidity. Kipen practically gave up writing. An-sky lived after the war in Vilna, then in Warsaw, and died in 1920. Yushkevich emigrated and died in 1927. Aizman also died in 1922. The new generation is hallmarked by the name of Isaac Babel. Not only because he was one of the most popular writers of the new Soviet literature, and most of his contemporaries were influenced at least in one of their periods by Babel, but mainly because Babel represents and is a symbol uniting both the highest summit and the final decline of Russian-Jewish literature in one and the same person.

Isaac Babel (1894–1940)

Babel was one of the most influential writers of the innovative twenties, the era of the great style change, a master of ornamental prose and a virtuoso of *skaz* narrative. He is the subject of a host of books by literary historians and analysts, and by far the best known and most popular of all the writers discussed in this book. This is precisely the reason why he is treated only from the specific aspect of Russian-Jewish literature.

Babel started out as a Russian-Jewish writer with the short story *Old Shloyme* (1913). He was fully aware already then, at the age of nineteen, that where the Jewish theme was concerned, the most important thing was to speak to Jews and Russian readers at the same time, and the only way to achieve this was through a reconciliation and simultaneity of external viewpoint and internal feeling and experience. Staying outside did not only appear in the author's keeping distant in this early work but also through a masterful "doubling" of distance, by depicting Shloyme himself as an outcast in his own family and in life. Shloyme is "an old man... driven out of his mind," his existence almost forgotten by the family, who "long ago lost the ability to understand anything," and "the events... did not interest him."²⁸ It is through his eyes, his limited perception, that we gradually begin to suspect that something

²⁸ Babel, I.: *Collected Stories*, trans D. McDuff, 1994, pp. 4, 5. In the following: Babel/McDuff.

is not right, that the Jews are being driven out of the town which Shloyme has never left in his whole life, "his son wanted to go away from his people, to a new God."

Ambiguity occurs not only in the simultaneousness of the external and internal viewpoint but also in the portrayal of the almost symbolic figure of Shloyme (see also pp. 228–229). He is a repulsive old man, has disgusting eating habits, and hides away food in a selfish manner, yet at the same time his childish attachment to useless old stuff is moving, as is his lonely, tearful desperation, articulated with great difficulty, when he realizes that his son is about to convert to Christianity. He wants to go nowhere, and there is no one else to complain to but God, and finally he hangs himself. Babel gives a shockingly powerful description, without any pathos, of the departure and becoming superfluous of a whole generation. "There was a strong wind, and soon the feeble body of Old Shloyme began to sway before the door of the house in which he had left the warm stove and the grease-stained Torah of his fathers." In the Russian original, the last word is "Torah," placed there with great precision, enhancing the cathartic effect.

Babel remembers his childhood in another early story called *Childhood* written, according to the evidence of the manuscript, in 1915, which never appeared in his lifetime. *At Grandmother's* may have been the first of the pieces which came to be called "autobiographical stories" later on. In all likelihood, a cycle of this kind had been planned by Babel himself (the note appears first beside the story *First Love*). The later these stories are written, the less autobiographical they are, the artistic elements gaining increasing prominence.²⁹ His reminiscences of the time spent with grandmother must have been closest to reality. In retrospect—from the vantage point of the later works—it can be clearly seen that even at that time Babel's artistic character was practically already "ready". The key again is duality and alternation between internal and external viewpoints (which is, in this case, the child's). The boy's yearning to break free from his stifling, close world is repeated three times. Of the sentences set with an almost measured regularity at the first third, the middle and toward the end of the story, the middle one is the most

29 Since the subsequent masterpieces portrayed a family full of miserable, crazy characters, it was thought for a long time that this was all real evidence of the author's poor family background, whereas in reality Babel had a well-to-do family in his childhood. In: Babel, I.: *Collected Stories*, 1955. Reprinted in: Babel/McDuff, pp. 339–64. It excuses these errors that in the sixties authentic data about Babel was very difficult to come by who, although published after having been rehabilitated, was soon "stricken off" and removed from Soviet literature again.

important and most precise: "all... made me want to flee from it and yet remain for ever."³⁰ Babel's basic voice is characterized by a gentle self-irony and subtle mockery in this balanced, bitterly objective image of Jewish generations. The grandmother remembers Polish counts and Hassidic rabbis with miraculous powers from her youth (this is the generation of Levanda!), speaks a mixture of Russian, Polish and Yiddish, and her oldest son died young in Canada. The grandson, who goes to a Russian grammar school (and has classes also on Saturday), is taught by her, on the basis of her own life experience that life is cruel. But she believes she is preparing him for a great and rich future. Burdened by the sorrow of generations and his own heavy fate, the boy, with his experience of the pogroms, grows into a nervous child.

Two stories by Babel which belong together, *The Story of My Dovecot* (1925) and *First Love* (1925) deal with the pogroms of 1905. However, the pogroms remain in the background as clearly indicated by the titles themselves, in the same way they would in the pages of *Red Cavalry*. Both of these titles are dominated by the typical aspects and events of childhood (the doves and teenage love), while the pogrom, history, the events turning the world upside down serve as a mere framework, almost a stage scenery. It is this shifted focus which lends a peculiar distance to the events. The child is able to look at the Cossack horseman threatening his father with admiration, and notice the beauty of physical power in the young peasant destroying his uncle's house. This dissonance could already be felt somewhat with Aizman in *Flood of Blood*, but appears openly for the first time in Babel's work. In 20th century world literature it would be with the rise of Fascism that this kind of paradoxical admiration for the hated but irresistible power would develop, with its sincere contrasts, into a peculiar, bizarre and highly revealing vision of the world (present in the works of Danilo Kiš, Günter Grass, Georges Perec, Imre Kertész and others). Child narrative, as mentioned, was an important pattern in Russian-Jewish literature from Bogrov's *Notes of a Jew* onwards, but beginning with Babel's work, it developed into a basic formula for the world's assimilationist literature, as will be shown in greater detail in the comparative chapter with a perspective devoted to an investigation of Russian and American parallels at the end of this book.

The rest of the stories evoking memories of childhood appeared only later (although with Babel it is impossible to know when he began to write, and how long he polished his works). The theme of *In the Basement* (1931) and

30 Babel/McDuff, p. 24.

Awakening (1931) is the same, but they end on a very different note. The theme is the relationship between art and reality, and the magic flight of fantasy, which helps one to forget reality and gain new friends. The Jewish boy escapes into the world of fantasies from his crazy family, just as his ancestors did, who lived under the spell of books and writing (like the grandfather scribbling away endlessly on his memoirs to be entitled *The Man with No Head*—a highly paradoxical title since the highest esteem in the eyes of the older Jewish generation was due precisely to men working with their “heads,” with spiritual values, far away from the hustle and bustle of the world). This escape therefore is, at the same time equal to a return (to traditions) and manifests the inability to break free (from the airless, unhealthy, closed world). In *Awakening*, we encounter a different kind of escape and a genuine breakout. A spiritual breakout is the realization of the boy, oblivious of nature up to then, that he did not know the names of trees, flowers and birds, and paid no attention to the things around him thus far, turning only inwards. But it goes along with this, if not a condition to it, that he must leave the paths trodden by Jews before him (according to the parents every Jewish Odessa child must necessarily be a child prodigy as a violinist), and Babel translates “leaving the path” into physical reality: skipping his music lessons, the boy begins to attend the seashore. He is learning about the sea along with other Jewish children, “rachitic starvelings,” the “last dregs of a tribe that did not know how to die,”³¹ and receives swimming lessons from a Russian philanthropic (and Judeophile) athlete and newspaper proof-reader. It is to the latter that the boy shows his first writings, and the teacher of life opens a new world before him. In these works Babel also contrasts the simple Jewish milieu, marvellous and full of brilliant talents, yet stifling, with that of the rich, high-society Odessa Jews. The seaside villa of the Borgman family, their magnificent parties, the jovial bank manager who is a regular reader of British dailies; they show up a world that is “European” in every respect. On the other hand he contrasts the world of books, of abstract knowledge with nature, and the exuberance of Life with a capital “L,” which he tried his best to get closer to with the lifelong curiosity of a child.

Examples of the vital, exuberant Odessa Jewry are the Odessa gangsters who are the protagonists of Babel’s *Odessa Stories* (1921–1924). This small cycle not only gives an insight into the strange world of Odessa which, after having been turned into a trade centre by several nationalities, became a

31 Ibid., pp. 63, 64.

strange micro-model of the Russian-Ukrainian South. (Babel actually wrote a confessional essay about it in 1916, "Every Young Man in Odessa.") Babel elevates the new generation of Jews to mythical heights. He sees them as a tough, self-assured, physically strong breed fully at home in the world, and living by their self-written laws, a mixture between gentlemen bandits and cowboys surrounded by a kind of Western-like romantic glory, Russian style. In line with the peculiar rules of romanticism, the characters are not ranked according to sheer strength, violence, or physical superiority. It is the "smooth killer" using the power of weapons only as a background who becomes really mythical: the fine-mannered, dignified, laconically spoken, gallant bandit with a sarcastic sense of humor, conducting complex diplomatic negotiations about money matters. As an early 20th century writer, one of the co-authors of the otherwise strongly anti-Semitic play *Smugglers* (1900)³² remarks: "Society looks with sympathy at the smugglers who are not seen as ordinary criminals but rather as gentlemen bandits, people pursuing a dangerous sport."³³

Odessa Stories remains within the Jewish milieu. Russians appear in supporting roles only, rather stereotypically portrayed, like the ridiculous, nameless police captain (*The King*) or the prostitute ("You can spend a night with a Russian woman, and the Russian woman will be satisfied with you.")³⁴ The narrator is no longer fully at home in this environment, but he is eager to learn everything about it. He is guided by nostalgia; he weaves the stories into legends because, unlike the inhabitants of this world, he is very much aware that all this is just about to vanish ultimately and irrevocably.

Babel portrayed the vanishing of the Jewish world in a variety of ways, first and foremost in the allegorically titled story and play *The Sunset* (1924, 1925) where the decline of patriarchal Jewry is seized in the moment when the sons lay a hand on their father. *The End of the Almshouse* (1932) uses a similarly telling title to depict the change to a new lifestyle. Everything falls clearly into place in *Froim Grach*, closely connected to the *Odessa Stories*, which was born later, in 1933, and never appeared in the author's lifetime. Grach, the leader of the one-time forty thousand Odessa robbers goes to the Cheka to start talks about the release of the arrested bandits. He negotiates according to his own

32 Viktor Krylov, 1838–1906 and Savely Litvin (Efron), 1849–1926. See. Henry, B.: "Jewish Plays on the Russian Stage: 1905–1907," *Yiddish Theater. New Approaches*, ed. J. Berkowitz, 2000.

33 Litvin, S. (Efron): "Vospominaniie o V. A. Krylove," *Istoricheskii vestnik* 104 (1906), p. 247.

34 "How it Was Done in Odessa," Babel/McDuff, p. 244. See also the character of Katya in *Father*.

rules, and demands a price offer. "You are killing off all the lions! And you know what you will be left with if you keep it up? You will be left with shit!"³⁵ The "foreign" Cheka men coming from Moscow cannot understand this language, and shoot Grach. These are no longer the nameless police captains of the past; the president of the Cheka uses his full name, because he is the new society itself: "...you must not forget that now we are the power, the state power! You must remember that! [...] What use would that man have been to the society we are building?" he asks, hinting at the Froim Grach whom he just killed.³⁶ Part of the answer is to be found also in the story's last word: "the past." It is perhaps no accident that the first-person-singular storyteller of *Odessa Stories* is no longer present on the pages of Froim Grach but we read a story told in the third person.

Passing from the old world to the new one, the narrator of *The Road* (1932) is on his way from Kiev to St. Petersburg after November of 1917. The date, mentioned in the first sentence of the story, is highly telling; the time is the immediate aftermath of the October revolution. The mood of the pogroms flares up: a railway telegrapher shoots a newly married Jewish schoolmaster travelling to Petersburg with Lunacharsky's permit, and stuffs his severed genitals into the mouth of his wife. The storyteller is let off by the *muzhik* holding him because he finds some gold on him, and lets him go. His "Road" leads to the Cheka, residing in a palace of the Tsar. The contrast is stunning. By settling in the seat of the old one, the new authority legitimizes itself. On the other hand, toying with objects never seen before, it takes possession of the accessories of luxurious living (there is a touch of the grotesque here), and finally, by the aid of these objects it looks into a past it knows nothing about. The Jewish storyteller "whose father is a storekeeper, a merchant, but he's washed his hands of them," finds a real home there. "Within a single day I had everything: clothes, food, work, and comrades true in friendship and death, comrades the likes of which you will not find anywhere in the world, except in our country. That is how, thirteen years ago, a wonderful life filled with thought and joy began for me."³⁷ Reading these exalted closing sentences, which impress the reader today as being utterly false as well as bitterly

35 Babel, I.: "Froim Grach," *The Complete Works of Isaac Babel*, ed. N. Babel, trans. with notes by P. Constantine, introduction by C. Ozick, 2002, p. 173. *Froim Grach* is not included in the McDuff translation that I prefer to use. Both editions make the same error when they broaden *Odessa Stories* to include more than the four short stories included in the little series by Babel himself.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 666.

ironic in the knowledge of the author's fate later on, one must be aware that when showing the moment in which a persecuted Jew, getting to Petersburg and to the closeness of power, finds a home and a new country, Babel portrays, in a sense, a very real process. He would have liked to believe himself that he was not wrong when he made the Soviet identity his. He had his doubts all along, but did not emigrate when he could have done so. Back in Moscow from a visit to his wife in Paris, he wrote to his mother, also in emigration by then: "Here life is poor and sad in many respects, but this is my material, my language, this is what I have anything to do with."³⁸ Babel's Soviet identity probably consisted to a large extent of the Russian language and of Soviet literature, to the elite of which he belonged.

The reader discerns false notes also in another work from the early 1930s, the final passage of the story *Karl-Jankel* (1931). The baby, named Karl after Marx, is made to be circumcised and named Iasha (Jacob) in secret by the Hassidic grandmother. The brothers of the young mother are all soldiers of the Red Army. "He and a few other lads from the shtetl were the beginning of the breed—conspicuous by its unexpectedness and picturesque quality—of Jewish fighters, raiders and partisans,"³⁹ Babel writes. The baby's father is a candidate for party membership who, returning from an official trip, brings a lawsuit against the grandmother. A show trial is held, similar to the ones which, as we have mentioned, were actually staged (one precisely against circumcision in Kharkov in 1928), and is targeted at Jewish traditions. The trial is led by a judge and a procurator, both Jews from Odessa (the latter with a name changed from Zusman to Orlov for its Russian ring). Babel avoids describing the actual sentence, but declares a verdict in the language of literature, which is primarily a judgement upon himself.⁴⁰ On the last page we see the baby, taken out to feed on the breast of a Kirghiz woman worker. In the red corner (traditionally the place for icons) there is a portrait of Lenin above them, surrounded by coloured production diagrams from a factory, flags and rifles. The women are guessing if he will be a soldier or an airman when he grows up. Among these stage settings, realistic to the point of being sugary in

38 Letter to his mother, Kiev, 20 October, 1928. In: Babel, I: *The Lonely Years. Unpublished Stories and Private Correspondence*, 1964. p. 106. Up to this day, Babel's family correspondence is accessible only in English translation, and remains unpublished in Russian. See Markish, Sh.: "Russko-evreiskaia literatura i Isaak Babel" [Russian Jewish Literature and Isaac Babel]. I. Babel. *Detstvo i drugie rasskazy*. 1979. pp. 319–45.

39 Babel/McDuff, p. 300.

40 Babel was dissatisfied with this work, as can be read in a letter he wrote abroad to his mother about it. Babel, I: *The Lonely Years*. p. 202.

their artificialness, the tope of a Socialist and internationalist *pieta* matches the tope which was so profoundly moving in *The Widow in Red Cavalry*, when Sashka, the “lady of all the squadrons” holds the dead body of the general on her knee.⁴¹ And if we missed the storyteller from the pages of *Froim Grach*, his presence is very marked here. It is with his thought that the story ends: “Now it was Karl-Yankel’s turn, but no one had fought for me as they were fighting for him... ‘It’s impossible,’ I whispered to myself, ‘that you will not be happy, Karl-Yankel... It’s impossible that you will not be happier than I...’”⁴² This sentimentalism would have been, if anything, even more inconceivable in Babel’s earlier works than its content, the author’s openly pledging himself to Soviet ideology. The sentence Babel declared upon himself was to fall silent. His writings, which he did not dare give to anyone, were confiscated upon his arrest, and disappeared in the KGB’s archives along with his legendary box. Not a single work of his surfaced after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the regime change.

Babel planned using a markedly Jewish local colour in the cycle *Hershele*, of which only a single piece appeared under the title *Shabbos Nakhamu* (1918). The itinerant motif of the picaresque story was combined with a colourful, humorous fairy-tale language, and the affectionate irony hidden beneath the surface evokes the memory of works like Lev Levanda’s Hassidic legends or Osip Rabinovich’s story about Khayim Shulim. Babel employed Jewish literary motifs later on, when he wrote a film scenario based on Sholom Aleichem’s *Wandering Star* under the same title (1926), but he changed the ending and, rather than America, he took his Jewish heroes to the illegal workers movements of pre-revolutionary Russia....

The most important achievement Babel gave to world literature is doubtlessly the many-faced, split-minded storyteller of *Red Cavalry* (1926), who cannot find his place between two ages and two cultures. The finest artistic expression of this contradiction, condensed into three pages, is found in the story *Gedali*. The narrator, setting out to look for the synagogue on a Friday night, is overtaken by nostalgia and, searching for his roots, tries to find consolation and peace in childhood memories and familiar traditions. However, as soon as Gedali puts to him questions about the violent nature of the revolution, he switches tone, and replies with pathetic revolutionary slogans. The poetic, wise yet childishly pure figure of Gedali is an artistic tour de force, but

41 See Hetényi, Zs.: “‘Up’ and ‘Down’, Madonna and Prostitute: the Role of Ambivalence in ‘Red Cavalry’ by Isaac Babel,” *Acta Litteraria Acad. Sci. Hung.* XXXII/3–4 (1990), pp. 309–26.

42 Babel/McDuff, pp. 308, 309.

the way in which the storyteller's inner conflicts are portrayed by narrative tools is even more masterful. He keeps repeating the slogans of the revolution even though he is unable to kill, and is never accepted as one of their own by the Red Cossack soldiers he admires so much. He lies to Gedali, but even more to himself. He wishes for a moment of quiet among the Jews, but when he is on the verge of finding it, he pushes the opportunity away in order to pose as a representative of the community which rejects him, and to which he yearns to belong to the point of self-denial.⁴³ "On the eve of the Shabbat I am tormented by a dense sadness of memories"—he remembers the candles of the Shabbat at the beginning of *Gedali*; then in his inner monologue, the narrator refers to the well-known Shabbat prayer "she has ascended her throne, the youthful Shabbat." Still, when Gedali turns to him saying "The Shabbat is coming in," he replies: "today is Friday, and it is already evening,"⁴⁴ thus separating himself from Gedali, if only in his spoken words. Babel makes it clear that Gedali also treats him as a stranger, and when he addresses the narrator as "pane tovarishch"⁴⁵ this not only means "mister tovarishch" but also intimates that Gedali addresses him in a Polish manner, thus making him out to be doubly different, both Polish and a red soldier, whereas in reality they are both Jews, only different.

Very different, indeed. They come from a different environment, as is mirrored, for instance, in the story *Berestechko*. The storyteller looks at the Jews of the small town in Volhynia in bewilderment, with a mixture of curiosity and revulsion, and the predominant element of the scene is the bad odour, the stink of close rooms, things in a ferment, the stifling prison of Hassidism, a place which would "never get any sun, gloomy, here human waste and the dung of cattle pile up over many days, pungent stench and rotten sourness, Berestechko stinks, smells of rotten herring, the shtetl stinks in expectation of a new era."⁴⁶ These are the most important perceptions. Or, as Babel writes in another place in the *Diary*, "The Jews are like portraits, elongated, silent, long-

43 In the story *My First Goose* the storyteller is even ready to kill in order to prove he is worthy of being accepted by the Cossacks. He kills a goose with his sword, and sits down happily to eat pork from a pot with the soldiers. The pork, forbidden to Jews, makes up a reference to the contrast between two cultures. The description of ritual acceptance is built on the elements of a peculiar initiation rite in which the Cossacks participate as priests in Babel's simile. In an episode of the *Diary*, when Babel asks for bread, a red soldier replies that he will have no business with Jews. "...I am an outsider, in long trousers, I do not belong, I am all alone," he complains. *Isaac Babel, 1920 Diary*, 1995, p. 51.

44 Babel/McDuff, pp. 116, 118.

45 The English translation "gentle pan" aims for a pun, but is not precise enough.

46 Babel/McDuff, pp. 161, 162.

bearded, not like our type, fat and jovial.”⁴⁷ In the *Diary* he wrote during the three months spent with the Red Cavalry, Babel assesses the world of the Jews in full awareness that as a Jew, he has the right to see them as pathetic and repellent. “Pathetic, fearsome tribe, march on,”⁴⁸ he sighs because he believes Jews must get out of the stifling atmosphere of the ghetto, where they got stuck amid the persecutions they suffered. According to the testimony of the *Diary*, Babel himself lost touch with the daily life of Jewry, he cannot even follow the prayer in the Torah. “I pray, or rather almost pray,”⁴⁹ he writes. He was not observant but still thought it important to visit the synagogue. In a letter written sixteen years later to his mother, we read: “I prayed, as always, in my own way, to a separate, different God.”⁵⁰ Babel’s prayer is a ritual asserting his belonging to his people, its culture and traditions, a ritual performed in awareness of the distance separating him from the community. Quartered with a Jewish family, he suspiciously denies that he is Jewish himself when he feels he is in the company of people like “wily flies,” while at other times he breaks into tearful confessions upon hearing Yiddish being spoken. He knows only too well, better than his hosts, the nature of the dangers threatening patriarchal Jewry: “Can it be that ours is the century in which they perish?”⁵¹ he asks in 1920...

The twenty-six year old author of the diary was looking for identification in two directions. He belonged to Jewry, but as a young Russian intellectual, he made deliberate moves towards becoming a writer in Soviet Russia. In the *Diary*, he calls both groups as “our people.” “Our men were looting last night, tossed out the Torah scrolls in the synagogue,”⁵² without noticing how absurd his word usage is. At the same time, he is still sincerely horrified upon seeing freedom being spread with the fire and sword...

The special tension of the attempt to connect Jewish roots and Soviet convictions is what made *Red Cavalry* such a unique book. In the 1920s this double affiliation was still taking shape, while in the 1930s it was already gone, and only its appearance could be maintained for a while with great effort and at the cost of self-deception. After that the only way left was to fall silent.

47 Isaac Babel, *1920 Diary*, p. 29.

48 Ibid., p. 6.

49 Ibid., p. 33.

50 *The Lonely Years*, p. 318, letter written on 17 September, 1936.

51 Isaac Babel, *1920 Diary*, p. 33.

52 Ibid., p. 85.

Lev Lunts (1901-1924)

Lunts died very young; his *oeuvre*—fives short plays, a couple of short stories and some articles—takes up no more than a slim volume. His first work (*Outlawed*, 1919) was banned, and after that he would remain unpublished in the Soviet Union. He was a theorist of the only apolitical writers' group, the Serapion Brothers. In the group's manifesto, entitled *Direction: West!* by Lunts, he advocated the following of Western models, and the existence of literature independent from politics and propaganda, and considered the restoration of the position of the plot his aim in his poetics.

"I am now all round in doubts, full of contradictions that are—how terrible—ethic contradictions!" complains Lev Lunts in his letter to Gorky in August 1922, one month after the short story *The Homeland*⁵³ was written.

I am a Jew, Jew convinced, faithful, and I am glad to be like that. And I am a Russian writer. But I am a Russian Jew, Russia is my homeland, I love Russia more than any other country. How is it possible to reconcile, to balance all that? I have reconciled everything for myself, for me everything is clear and clean, but others think differently. They say: A Jew cannot become a Russian writer! They say so because I refuse to write in the same way as nine tenths of all Russian writers. I do not like their coarse, heavy provincial dialect, the petty daily routine, the tedious word play even when the game is nice and pleasing. I like great concepts and monumental, interesting plots. I prefer Western literature to Russian literature.⁵⁴

In another letter, he turns to his parents: "I will not leave Russia. I cannot live outside Russia, I am a Jew, but Russia is my homeland, my mother tongue is Russian, I am sorry for the sentiments."⁵⁵ Curiously enough, unlike these letters, Lunts' short story *The Homeland* does not at all give a determined answer to the contradiction of the double rootedness or dual rootedness of Jewish culture in a host country.

⁵³ The short story that Lunts finished in July 1922 was first published in *Evropeiskii almanakh*, 1923. In 1977 the samizdat-periodical *Evreii v SSSR* (No. 18, July) re-published it in Moscow and in Israel 22 (No. 8). My references are to the first collection of Lunts' works in Russia. Page numbers refer to this edition, the English translation is mine.

⁵⁴ Lunts, L.: *Vne zakona, Piesy, rasskazy, statii*, 1994, pp. 219–20.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

Duality is reflected from the very beginning as the predominant element of the form of the dialogue itself. Venia, one of the protagonists' names, suggests that he is identical to Veniamin Kaverin, to whom the short story is dedicated, while Lyova, the first person singular narrator of the first chapter, refers to the author. The dialogue between the two characters parallels an implicit, inner dialogue, present in both of them as a result of their own internal conflicts. Moreover, when the plot is transplanted into the Biblical past (Chapter 2), the parallel of the two historical eras also evokes the form of the vivid dialogue, and, after all, the simultaneity of the two cultures, the juxtaposition of the two homelands also involves the form of dialogue expressing an eternal duality where there is no choice or definite answer.

The three chapters of the short story are arranged in a structure of frames: the first and third chapters are set in St. Petersburg, in what is the present time for the author. The second, which is divided into ten subchapters, transfers the plot to Babylon, to the time of the Babylonian exile. In accordance with the leap in time, the voice of the narrator changes: the first-person narrator switches to a third-person narrator, and the names of the two characters, Lyova and Venia, change over into their Hebrew version: Yehuda and Benyomin.⁵⁶ While the dialogues in St. Petersburg are presented in the short replies of everyday urban language, the central chapter's dialogues are imitations and stylizations of sublime Biblical rhetoric.⁵⁷ At the same time the narrator's tone and the mechanics, shaping the prose-text, both in the frame-chapters and in the second chapter, are equally influenced by avant-garde prose and ornamentalism alike. This continuity in the narrator's voice serves to link the two contrasted times, the 20th century and that of the Babylonian exile. This link is even more explicitly presented in the repetitive descriptions of the two cities, Petersburg and Babylon, in the same words. Their straight streets and perpendicular corners with geometric crossings⁵⁸ refer to the famous rectangular design in the model-novel *Petersburg* by the symbolist Andrei Bely. (We should not forget that the short story was written in 1922. Since 1914, the city had been referred to as Petrograd so the allusion to Bely was a direct one.) In this parallel St. Petersburg becomes a place of exile: it is

56 Lyova is the diminutive form of the name Lev, and Venia is that of Ven'amin. The Hebrew equivalent of the former is Yehuda or Yuda, the latter stems from Benyamin/Benyomin.

57 Lunts often uses the typical Biblical construction of the sentences reflecting the Hebrew when the parts are linked with a sequence of "and"-conjunctions. See also Yahve's text and Benyomin's prophecy (pp. 20-1).

58 Ibid., pp. 14, 15, 16, 24.

the same "strange city with a strange language" as Babylon. The word "strange" runs throughout the whole story and it is the story's last, concluding word. However, Yehuda "loves Babylon, because he was born there" and Lyova, his modern incarnation "loves Petersburg, because he was born there."⁵⁹

The common root of the Russian verb *rodils'a* and the title of the short story, *Rodina*, is relevant. What is the definition of homeland? Is it the place where one was born or is it rather an inner identification with a nation and its culture? The answer to this question separates the friends, Benyomin and Yehuda. Venia, who tries to deny and reject his Jewishness three times in the first chapter, seems to be a confirmed self-hating Jew. "I do not like Jews. They are dirty..."; "I do not want to be a Jew"; "I am a stranger to myself."⁶⁰ Benyomin, his Babylonian alter ego, after suffering an epileptic attack, is granted the gift of uttering divinely inspired revelations. He becomes a leader of his people on its way back to Jerusalem, to the West. He rejects his friend Yehuda, and treats him as a traitor to his people because Yehuda does not leave Babylon with the Jews, but cuts his beard and marries a Persian girl. He repeats the same words Benyomin said earlier: "I do not believe."⁶¹

Benyomin is as immovable in his new role of prophet as Venia was unshakable as a self-hating Jew. Lunts does not bring him back to the present—he remains forever in the past. Unlike Benyomin, Yehuda returns to St. Petersburg with ease, and there are three hints in the text showing that it was not his first visit to the past; it is not the first time he has come to the synagogue to step across the magic door. "This is not the first time I am coming here"; "I have been here many times"; "I have been here already three times."⁶² Lyova is uncertain, doubtful, ambiguous, and his split personality helps him to cross the line between the different ages with ease—and this metaphoric point gives a clue to the whole interpretation of the short story.

Yehuda/Lyova has to pay dearly for this freedom to return to the past. Lunts creates a twofold structure in the repetition of portraits that widens this metaphor. The first portrait, repeated itself in two overlapping portraits—those of present-time Venia and his past-time alter ego, Benyomin—outline a romantic, heroic image of the prophet in all aspects. "In the mirror there was a tall man with a strong face, his black hair falling angrily on his stubborn

59 Ibid., pp. 13, 18.

60 Ibid., pp. 13, 14.

61 Ibid., pp. 20, 21.

62 Ibid., pp. 14, 15.

forehead, and his wild, deep-set eyes recalling the desert shine passionately under his peaceful, clear eyebrows.”⁶³

The other portrait is a negative version of these two, and contrasts these same details. This time it is Lyova’s face reflected in the mirror. (The mirror itself helps to stress again the doubled, split personality of the main character.) The negative characteristic of the first-person narrator is crowned by this explicitly repulsive picture, consisting of anti-Semitic cliché. Lyova, who is short, puny and despondent, finds himself disgusting. Everything that was beautiful and ancient in his person he left in the past. “In the mirror there is a short, bald man with a narrow forehead and wet and sly eyes; he is dirty and disgusting. It was me. I recognized myself. I realized that everything that was beautiful and ancient in me, my high forehead and enthusiastic eyes, I left there.”⁶⁴

The corresponding details in the heroic-romantic and in the negative-repulsive portraits, however, link together the two contrapuntal poles by showing that the characters, schizophrenic in their doubts, are *Doppelgänger*s with different solutions in their fates. They are brothers in the Bible, Judah and Benjamin, and these brothers in history and myth are duplicated in Lunts’s two characters, Yehuda and Benyomin, in Babylon, then once again in Petersburg (Lyova and Venia), and finally in the characters’ background figures, the two writers, Lunts and Kaverin, in St. Petersburg, who were, in a way, also brothers. They were the two youngest members of the Serapion Brothers, the most famous apolitical group of writers in the 1920s.

Lunts gives the Biblical version of the two character’s names (Yehuda and Benyomin) in a spelling which is different from that of the Russian Bible. This phonetic transscription of the Hebrew names emphasizes their etymological meaning. “My name is Lev, that is Yehuda, but what is in me that is lionish? I am short and puny, my nose is crooked downwards, to my lips.”⁶⁵

This correlation recalls Genesis 49:9, where Jacob blesses his son, saying: “Judah is a lion’s whelp; On prey, my son, have you grown. He crouches, lies down like a lion.”⁶⁶ While Yehuda does not conform to the meaning of his name, Benyomin’s destiny in the short story is anticipated by his name. Benyomin means “the son of the right hand,” and Lunts makes him fulfill the

63 Ibid., p. 13.

64 Ibid., pp. 23, 24.

65 Ibid., p. 13.

66 *Tanakh. A new translation of The Holy Scriptures according to the traditional Hebrew text*, 1985.

meaning, hidden in his name. Benyomin becomes the one-armed prophet after having cut off his left arm, because he was not able to scrape down the three points forming a triangle on it. This triangle, "the eternal stigma of the wise Europe"⁶⁷ is a common sign on Yehuda's and Benyomin's arms showing that they have met each other and they can speak a common strange language in Babylon (apparently Russian).

The three vaccination-scars, the marks of smallpox shots, again link the two different time planes. The two protagonists have met already—in the future, and were brothers, Serapion Brothers. The significance of these marks is enhanced by the fact that the three points constituting a triangle is a well-known and widely used code of abbreviation in Freemasonic texts. This symbolic meaning can be supported by other Freemasonic allusions, namely that the members of the Serapion Brothers were given metaphoric names, and called themselves "brothers," that is, monks, of an order with metaphoric functions and offices. (V. A. Kaverin was Brother Alchemist, L. N. Lunts was Brother Wandering Artist. K. A. Fedin, S. K. Nikitin and M. L. Slonimsky also held usual freemasonic functions.)

The dramatic culmination of the plot is embedded in a Biblical context. The story seems to be saturated with Biblical references. Surprisingly enough, many of these references appear to be only quasi-Biblical. (Remat, the name of Yehuda's wife gives in inverted form Tamar, the name of the woman who gave sons to Judah, son of Jacob. Some of the geographical nouns, e.g. Kheron, Lilil-Chigalla, only phonetically imitate the spatial reality of Babylon and are not mentioned in the Bible). Some references are intentionally modified (the number of Jews leaving Babylon for Jerusalem is not 42,360 as in Ezra 2:64, but 42,600, etc.). The plethora of biblical elements does not prevent us from recognizing the sweeping alteration that Biblical history undergoes in Lunts's hands. The significant divergence from the Bible is not confined to the tradition of developing and expanding the story into a secularized version. Lunts does not seem to accept the sacredness and intactness of the Biblical text when he chooses a crucial point in the Biblical history of Jews.

In Chapter 1 of Ezra, when the Jews return to Jerusalem from exile, the names of Judah and Benjamin are mentioned together: "So the chiefs of the clans of Judah and Benjamin, and the priest and Levite, all whose spirit had been roused by God, got ready to go up to build the House of the LORD that is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5). The names of 4th and 12th sons of Jacob here fig-

⁶⁷ Lunts, *The Homeland*, p. 13.

ure as an emblematic *pars pro toto*, meaning the Jewish people. After the birth of David, Judah's tribe became the leader of Israel. But Benjamin's tribe brought down all the other clans' wrath on itself, and was almost totally massacred (Judges 20). This inter-tribal war had a conflict for its beginning, caused also, as in Lunts's short story, by an unfortunate marriage.

From the short story's point of view a historical detail might be also relevant. Judah's tribe included more non-Israelite elements than any other Jewish tribe. This might be associated with Yehuda's split personality and unusual, rule-breaking Jewishness.

Yehuda's and Benyomin's names in the beginning of the Book of Ezra probably involve a parallel between the return from Babylonian exile and the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. And here we are in Lunts's story where the tradition of parallel is broken: Benjamin is going with his people and Judah does not return to Jerusalem. The symbolic meaning of the name "Judah," namely, that the general name of the entire Jewish people actually takes its plural form, "Yehudim," makes this break of tradition even more meaningful. His choice is that of exile, instead of return to the roots, to the homeland. With Yehuda's reluctance to go to Jerusalem and by saving him (and only him, not Benyomin) for the future, Lunts manifestly destroys the frames of the Scriptural tradition. His text which acts at once diachronically and synchronically, establishes a new relation to the past and to the Bible.

If Lunts refuses the canonized text as tradition, he does not identify his hero Lyova's Jewishness with the laws of Judaism. Lyova's family lives in a virtual space and time, though physically in St. Petersburg, they are in Jerusalem in spirit, where they have never been. Lyova breaks the rules and tradition of the Shabbat, Judaism is no longer his religion. This holds true also for Yehuda, who does not pray with the Jews. Yehuda's character consists of romantic, poetized stereotypes. His "pain in the soul,"⁶⁸ periods of depression are followed by a state of manic excitement when he aimlessly runs facing the wind. His maniacal running can be interpreted as a version of the eternal movement attributed to the Jews in the medieval legend of the wandering Jew, especially because his restlessness is strengthened by his loneliness. He is a stranger, a newcomer, who does not know his father's name.⁶⁹ An accumulation of negative particles underlines his solitude and rootlessness: "He had no father, no mother, no grandfather, no friend, and nobody knew his clan or tribe of origin, but he was a Jew."⁷⁰

68 Ibid., p. 17.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., p. 15.

This romantic rootlessness in a short story devoted to the seeking of a homeland foreshadows the paradox presented by Lunts at the end of the short story in the binarity of the concluding words, "rodnoi—chuzhoi." In essence, his story is more about the pursuit of himself than the pursuit of homeland. His spiritual searching is spatially concretized in the protagonist's descent into an underground corridor through a little door in the wall of a synagogue on the day of Shabbat. This *kathabasis* leads not only to the past, but to the depths of the subconscious. The details of this description correspond to Lunts's concept of writing in great plots, using interesting motifs of fantastic literature following E. T. A. Hoffmann as a master. (The name of the Serapion Brothers comes from an identically titled story by E. T. A. Hoffmann.)⁷¹

There is an interesting coincidental parallel in Franz Rosenzweig's letter, where the great philosopher, contributor of Martin Buber in the new German translation of the Hebrew Bible, uses the same allegoric image of *kathabasis* in order to explain how he has rediscovered his Jewish roots. The origin of this allegory for the philosopher can be easily identified. Rosenzweig mentions in other letters that he was impressed by a novel he read during World War I in the army—the popular *Golem* by Gustav Meyrink. It would be surprising if Lunts, the admirer of German literature had not come across this novel, if not in German, then perhaps in Russian, because it was translated and published the same year Lunts was writing *The Homeland*. (Another Russian translation was published in Berlin a year earlier.)⁷² In all the three descents—that mentioned by Rosenzweig, and those in *Golem* and *The Homeland*—the way to the past, after all, is a way to the present. Meyrink's protagonist, Master Pernat, finds the passage through his own childhood to the present time, Yehuda returns to be Lyova again when he is beaten to death by his own people. Rosenzweig's philosophical theory of dialogue is based on this return to the past that ought to give an opportunity to find the old treasure in Jewish heritage, bring it to the light of the present time and see that it does not fade. His theory suggests that Judaism is the eternal root to which European culture must turn and return in the form of dialogue.

This seems to be Lunts's relationship to the past and to Jewish heritage. This vivid dialogue is a privilege that he endows only upon his doubled character

71 Cf. Lunts' essays *Why are we Serapion-Brothers* (1922); and *To the West!* (1922). In: Lunts, pp. 198–214.

72 Meyrink, G.: *Golem*, transl. by M. Kadisha, 1921. And: Meyrink, G.: *Golem*, transl. and intr. by D. I. Vygodsky, ed. A. Volynsky, 1922.

Lyova, who is able to go back in time and return from there. As it was shown from the beginning, precisely the dialogue is the formative power that supports the entire narrative, the predominant element along which the story is organized. Lunts does not seek mythopoetic archetypes in Biblical parallelism, but creates a direct link between the present and Biblical times. Lunts's approach to the Biblical plot is a secular, psychological version of allegorical exegesis, in which one can spiritually pass through the events of Jewish history again.

Andrei Sobol (1888–1926)

In his life, which was as eventful as it was short, Andrei Sobol experienced all the twists and turns typical of the life of Jews in Russia in his time; indeed, his life was so typical it was almost symbolic. He tried his hand at everything. He roamed from Siberia to Switzerland, seeking for his place high and low, in the depths of prisons and at the peaks of officialdom as secretary of the writers' union, until, at the age of 38, he decided that he had failed to find it, and killed himself. Path-seeking and autobiographical elements inspired his works too, only a part of which treat Jewish themes and belong to what we regard as Russian-Jewish literature.

Slow Stream (1918), a family saga condensed into a short story, shows the various choices open for Jews in the process of assimilation through the members of a populous family. The father, Moisei Davidovich, a Siberian farmer and trader, belongs to the new generation of physically and spiritually strong Jewish heroes, the prototype of which we find in Kipen's horse trader. His bones are like iron, he is broad-shouldered, tall and powerful. Sobol practically repeats Kipen's key scene: the horse trader lifts a carriage with a broken axle single handed, while Moisei Davidovich bridles a wild horse with his bare hands. Both have a wonderful way with horses. It seems as if in Russian-Jewish literature, handling horses were a kind of test of assimilation. After Kipen's and Sobol's heroes pass the test with flying colours, Babel's storyteller fails it: the soldiers of the Red Cavalry reject Lyutov who cannot ride (and cannot kill either [see Argamak]).⁷³ The seven sons and one daughter of Moisei Davidovich, a number fit for legends and fairy-tales, also testifies to the manliness, fertility and vitality of the father. Their mother died, having been

⁷³ Babel himself loved horses passionately.

as much of a misfit in this masculine-patriarchal family as her daughter, who is a dreamer, yearning for far away lands. Life here is controlled by the seasons; Moisei Davidovich remembers he is Jewish only in wintertime, and even then only on Saturdays and at Passover. The seven sons include a fisherman, a drunkard, an entrepreneur and a farmer in love with horses; they are self-confident men feeling at home in Siberia. Yet another son roams the world as a circus wrestler, "the first Jew to pin all opponents to the ground."⁷⁴ Only the youngest son goes to university. Monia, the future intellectual, makes friends among revolutionaries, and they are the ones—Monia's friends brought from the university—who upset the "slow stream" that is the order in the life of the family. The basic situation is well known from Chekhov's dramas: a guest or relative coming from outside stirs up the still water of rural life. Monia also sees the future of Jewry in assimilation. "The Jewish masses must become like my family, tough and powerful, and must either melt into their environment or disappear utterly."⁷⁵

Hardly four years later the figure of the strong, self-confident Jew was already replaced with the homeless wanderer in Sobol's works. In the story *Get Up and Walk* (1922) he constructs two narrators in order to double his distance from his subject. Aside from the storyteller speaking in the first lines, he also inserts a diarist (it is the former who publishes the diary left behind by his compatriot after his visit to the storyteller) so the writer can hide behind two layers. This diarist is a shadowy character, a man of uncertain means, who even bears a different name in every country he lives in (Sobol himself actually used three different names, see his biography). He converted to Christianity earlier on for the sake of a marriage in which his wife calls him a dirty Jew, whereupon he leaves for the world at large. On the verge of starvation, he is employed by a theatre troupe in Paris, where he must act the role of Pranaitis, the anti-Semitic Lithuanian Catholic priest who was the prosecution's star witness in the Beilis blood libel trial (Kiev, 1913). This role is a "life role" for him. He abandoned the Jews and got baptized; now he has to do penance in the role of the Catholic priest. While acting, he is reminded of another "role" he played in the church at his wedding. Pranaitis is a negative character in the play, so he is booed and pelted with rotten eggs by the audience; for his negative role he not only has to do penance but must also be punished. "I want to go home! Where is my home, which is my home?" the bewildered hero asks

74 Sobol, A.: "Tikhoie techeniie," *Evreiskii mir. Literaturnye sborniki*, ed. A. Sobol, E. B. Loitera, Kn. 1, Moscow, 1918, p. 262.

75 Ibid.

desperately. The series of parallels is made complete by the recognition of Gomelsky's final role. He retreats from the world. He spends his remaining money on a symbolic "change of dress," on purchasing his new "costume." He buys gaudy clothes, an accordion, a small buggy and, most important, a donkey which he baptizes with sea water. The story's Russian title recalls the Book of Jonah (1:2), but the Hebrew title of the diary, *lekh lekha*—by mistake or deliberately—is taken not from the Book of Jonah but from the Book of Creation, "Get thee out of thy country" (1 Mos. 12:1, literally: "go for you"). After the summons, Abraham is made the promise: "I will make thee a great nation." But the Book of Jonah evokes primarily the image of man not as obeying his mission, but running away from it, and the sermon about remorse and revolt is only the second reference. This running, escaping into emigration and drifting about in foreign lands, is the fate of the wandering Jew of the 20th century. The combination of the two Old Testament texts is completed at the end of the story with a third Biblical association, this time from the New Testament. A new parallel emerges: that of Christ entering Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, so an allusion to a similar sentence in the New Testament—"rise and go"—may also be discerned in the title. The road is endless, but somewhere in infinity there stands this strange, many-faced figure, a combination of obedient Abraham fulfilling his mission, Jonah who runs away from his, and a recreation of Christ in the same person as the sick man who stood on his feet. And finally they all merge into the grotesque figure of the itinerant clown: the wandering Jew himself.

The volume *Safrut*, in which the story was published, was banned later, as we have mentioned. Yet as a matter of fact, the contents list of the book, published in Berlin in 1922, exemplifies the coexistence of cultures in a fine way. Works of fiction included, on the one hand, the works of Byalik and Chernikhovski in a Russian translation (they wrote in Hebrew), two pieces by Ansky, who wrote in Yiddish, as well as Bunin and Bryusov from among the best Russian authors, and finally the Russian-Jewish writers Samuil Marshak⁷⁶ and Andrei Sobol.

Analysts looking for the Jewish spirit or mentality in literature may easily find it in the basic mood of Sobol's novella *Salon Car* (1922), or in the mental attitude of its protagonist, but this short novel does not belong to Russian-Jewish literature in the strict sense outlined in the first theoretical chapters of

76 Samuil Marshak began his career as a Jewish poet. This volume of *Safrut* includes his poem "Jerusalem." Under the impact of the events of the 1920s he completely abandoned Jewish literature, then escaped or retreated into children's fiction.

this book. The attraction between the hero, disillusioned by the violence of the revolution, and the aristocratic girl, who lost everything due to the revolution, unfolds in the settings of the blue-carpeted and cushioned saloon car, but never comes to fulfillment. The wagon was once owned by the girl's grandfather but now belongs to the revolutionary military units. The protagonist, divided in his loyalties, saves the girl with a final, desperate gesture, then dies in the fighting. The romantic story is described by Sobol in broken chapters, seizing various moments in the continuum of the events, and the narrative idiom is also reserved, elliptic, made tense by restrained feelings.⁷⁷

In the brief short story *In the Cellar* (1922) Sobol uses the micro-world of three people on the run to filter through it the history of the 1920s in Russia. The story begins with a long sentence packed with enumerations. This one-page panorama of Russia on the move, travelling in heated boxcars, reminds the reader of Boris Pilnyak's epoch-making novel *The Naked Year* (1921), more particularly the section "The Third Part of the Tryptich, the Darkest" of Chapter V. Sobol was a worthy follower of this masterpiece of ornamental prose, one of the first of the post-Civil War novels. He recorded the same chaos, the same bewilderment of ordinary people confused by the alternating rule of Reds and Whites and caught up in the general violence. Three men set out to flee the border across the Dniester in the boat of a smuggler, a White Guard officer tired of fighting, a lawyer, a member of the Cadet Party, and a Jew, about whom Sobol tells more than about the others. "David Puzik did not correspond with Milyukov, he did not take Tsaritsin, nor did he run away from there, but he bore three heavy crosses, a triple burden, all his life: he was Jewish, he had a wart of catastrophic dimensions upon his nose with a tail hanging down to his lips, and then there was also his name. He was beaten because of the first, mocked on account the second, and the third was simply impossible to live with."⁷⁸ Puzik's wart is a tool of individualization, of "peculiar-making" (*ostraneniie*),⁷⁹ as well as a peculiar, ambiguous way of characterizing a Jew, a victim of persecution yet a repulsive figure, thus the reader's

⁷⁷ The basic situation of the work may have influenced the train scenes, related to Antipov, of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*.

⁷⁸ The first part of the quote refers to the president of the Cadet Party Milyukov, Pavel Nikolaievich (1859–1943) and the travelling companion who is a member of that party, the participant in the battle of Tsaritsin means the second travelling companion, the army officer. The meaning of the name Puzik is "little potbelly."

⁷⁹ Shklovsky's term in literary theory, denoting the unusual as opposed to the typical, an approach and linguistic forms of expression breaking away from the canonized forms, in *Art as Method* (1917).

sense of identification with him is anything but automatic. Puzik is on his way to Palestine where, under a Jewish sky he hopes to find some peace from persecutions, and also to change his name to the dignified David ben-Simon.

In the cellar of the man-smuggler, the White officer explodes in an angry anti-Semitic diatribe. "It's because of them that I have lice. Where's my battalion? Where's my toilet bag? Where's all Russia?" He turns to Puzik: "You should stay in Russia! You don't want to be a cavalry inspector? Why? You don't? You want more?"⁸⁰ And when it turns out that Puzik does not have the money for the ride, only two of them are allowed into the boat. Puzik jumps into the icy water and holds on to the boat's edge, but the captain pushes him into the depths. "The bottom of the boat was sliding away from Puzik fast, as fast as if he had been kicked from the threshold of a hut down to the depth of the cellar, to eternal darkness. He must only get closer to the Promised Land under the ancient sky that is rightfully his! The waves of the river closed over him like clouds running in the sky..." Sobol merges the worlds high up and down below, the sky and the depths beautifully, in a cinematic manner. At the same time he doubles both worlds, and reflects the mirror image of the two skies, the Russian sky at the border and the imaginary one in Palestine, as well as the river running down below and the dark cellar, upon one another. Tragedy only cries out louder and is made more acutely felt by silence and looking the other way. Life goes on; the next day another group is getting ready in the cellar.

Semyon Hekht (1903–1963)

Hekht was one of the authors discovered by the new society. He was first noticed by Eduard Bagritsky in 1922, then by Isaac Babel, and adopted by the developing writer elite of the twenties in the editorial offices of the satirical weekly *Gudok*, which was to be made famous later by authors like Ilf and Petrov, Olesha, Bulgakov, Valentin Kataev and others. From the aspect of Russian-Jewish literature, two highly important works of his deserve special mention.

80 Sobol, A.: "Pogreb," *Liubov' na Arbate*, 1925, pp. 35, 36.

Hekht's novella *The Man Who Forgot His Life* (1927)⁸¹ proceeds seemingly along two threads of action, till the two converge, and it is revealed that the anti-Semitic gypsy creating a scandal in the first chapter is in reality a Jewish shoemaker running from his fate, who was banished by the Jews and put to shame by the Ukrainians. The opening scene has a twofold significance. Not only does it create a shockingly contrasting framework together with the closing of the story (with the realization at the end that the gypsy and the Jew are the same person) but it also provides a masterly panorama of the reactions of the most varied strata of society (peasant woman, official, policeman, railwayman, conductor) to anti-Semitic phrases. The plot, as developed by Hekht, implies several twists or moral conundrums, as it were. Zelts, the shoemaker "betrays" Jewry by actually adhering to one of its prime commandments, loyalty to the family: he obeys the Ukrainian soldiers, eats lard and recites anti-Semitic phrases because all he wants is to save his son, his only remaining son at that too, as the younger son died. His son, Nakhman, is the *kaddish*,⁸² the continuer of the family (in a broader sense, the people, the tribe, the tradition), whose name means "consoler" (see later). "The one who saves a soul saves the whole world," a pro-Jewish Gentile doctor repeats in the story. It is the same holy principle that Zelts himself shouts in the empty street at his co-religionists, who lack the strength to notice the personal tragedy in Zelts's destiny, and he is banished by the very people who share his fate.

The subject of Hekht's interest is not really the psychology of anti-Semitism. He shows that the Ukrainian soldiers are unable to formulate their hatred for Jews in any other way except crude stereotypes (of which they run out fast, since there is a limited supply of those). This also helps him to convey that anti-Semitism is in fact not a consistent system of thought but the psychological form in which violence accessible in automatism and handy, ready-made formulas appears. The picture drawn by Hekht of the destiny of the individual falling victim to the universal atmosphere of hatred is much more subtle. Zelts is banished in the name of rigid dogmas, but the very same

81 Hekht, S.: *Chelovek, kotoryi zabyl svoiu zhizn'*, Har'kov, Proletarii, 1927. Reprinted in: Hekht, S.: *Prostoi rasskaz o mertvetsakh i drugie proizvedeniia*, Jerusalem, 1983. An analysis is hard to understand without knowledge of the main elements of the plot. The only son of the shoemaker Zelts volunteers to the Ukrainian nationalist army of Simion Petlyura out of sheer bravado. In return for releasing his son Nakhman, the bandits demand that he recite anti-Semitic phrases in the city's main square in front of Jews who would not talk to him again. However, Nakhman is killed. Zelts roams the world and wanders with gypsies.

82 The *kaddish* is also a prayer of orphans, said for the dead parents. This is the reason why a lonely son is also called "kaddish," because only he is left to say the prayer for his parents.

dogmas are the foundation stone of tradition, a major part of the centuries-old survival and defence mechanism of Jewry, a permanent state of alert forced upon Jews by the persistence of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. Zelts's running away, his finding himself outside time, indeed, his derangement, symbolizes the *cul de sac* of assimilation, the failure of which is anticipated well ahead, which also means that the Jewish question is delegated by Hekht to the sphere of irresolvable problems. Through the figure of Zelts, Hekht recreates the character of the wandering Jew—the eternal Jew suffering punishment outside space and time—and he only aggravates his position by degrading him even lower, to the level of another wandering nation suffering perhaps even more persecution, possibly even more homeless: the gypsies. Of the many varieties of the mediaeval Christian legend of the wandering Jew, Hekht refers to only one through the profession of his protagonist. He is a shoe (or boot) maker. According to one variant of the legend, published first in Germany in 1602, the Wandering Jew (the eternally wandering Jew)⁸³ is a boot maker who denied Christ a rest at the crossroads, and is condemned to eternal life in punishment. Besides being a symbol of mankind advancing painfully, through struggles toward redemption (as the legend was interpreted by Goethe in his fragment *Der ewige Jude* [1744]), the legend gradually took on mythical dimensions, becoming the symbol of dispersed Jewry.⁸⁴ In the German variety the name of the boot maker is Ahasuerus, and although no research was done on the name, in the wake of his German sources, Hekht also connects the legend with the figure of the Persian Ahasuerus, King Xerxes, helper of the Jews, whose biography and character is taken on by the mentally disturbed Zelts. This connection, and knowledge of the Ahasuerus story found in the Books of Esther in the Old Testament opens new possibilities for interpretation; one element, however, is highly important: Zelts identifies himself with a Biblical character, but a non-Jewish one: in fact this particular character is originally hostile to the Jews.

The real victim in the novella is Nakhman, the son, who suffers martyrdom for his principles. The child's way of thinking, as we have mentioned, is a fundamental poetic tool of value comparisons in the literature of assimilation, a

83 The term survived in different forms in various languages. In English and French he is the "wandering" or "roaming" Jew (Wandering Jew, *Juif errant*), while in German, the emphasis is on his fate being eternal, so he is the "Eternal Jew" (*Ewige Jude*).

84 On its employment in world literature, see *The Wandering Jew. Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend*, 1986; Klauber, V.: "Mythe du Juif errant," *Dictionnaire du judaïsme*, Paris, 1998, pp. 428–9.

tool which appears first in Russian-Jewish literature in the novel of Bogrov. Thirteen-year old Nakhman has a black-and-white vision of the world, picked up from books, and in this world he imagines himself in all kinds of romantic roles. Similarly to Bogrov's novel, the irreconcilability of the two worlds, Jewish and Gentile, and through them, that of the real world and the imaginary one, appears at its most acute in a childish love felt for a Gentile girl (whose father, to make it even worse, is a policeman). The reason Nakhman rushes into the trap of the Petlyurists⁸⁵ and his own demise is his childish desire to prove that Jews can ride a horse and fight as well as anybody else. Physical weakness and prowess also appear as a kind of recurrent watershed of characters in Russian-Jewish literature.

In the early stages of Russian-Jewish literature, physical might occurs mainly as the antithesis to the compliance, the all-enduring and self-humiliating behaviour of Jews, emphasizing the moral superiority of spiritual power, of retaining one's dignity even in defeat, as the opposite attitude. And while this model lives on (see Kipen's *At a Crossroads* [1910]) the militant stance of the self-defence units organized during and after the pogroms, also the possibility of physical resistance, and even its requirement, gradually seeps over into literature (Kipen: *The Horse Trader*; Sobol: *Slow Stream*; Babel: *Odessa Tales*, *Red Cavalry*). We have also mentioned that riding skills and being knowledgeable about horses figure as a proof of physical prowess with all three of these authors; only Babel's *Odessa Tales* gives a view of urban bravery, of the romantic world of "elegant," refined banditry.

As opposed to all this, Hekht emphasizes that the heroic role remains nothing but a dream for Jewry. Nakhman falls into a trap because of his bravado, and besides his childish naiveté, his vulnerability also destines him to fall prey to the brutality of his opponents whom he tries to join in a silly gesture. Nakhman is oversensitive; he freezes and faints upon hearing loud voices or noise. His constitution and his dreams are incompatible; that is why he yearns so fervently for a heroic role. In a feature characteristic of early adolescence—extreme courage driven by wishful dreams—and its tragic outcome, Hekht seems to capture the inclination of Jewry to create abstractions existing only in theory, to build castles in the air, to aspirations that are too far-fetched and remote from reality, along with the inevitable failure of all these. At the same

85 Simion Petlyura (1879–1926): Ukrainian nationalist leader commanding an autonomous army fighting against the Reds in the Russian Civil War, though not as a part of the White Army. For a brief period, he was also President of Ukraine. He was assassinated in Paris in 1926.

time, though, in the fable itself, the role of Nakhman, the child victim, means only the first move in the creation of a classical catharsis, accomplished through the loss of value of the tragedy. The second step comes when the reader recognizes Zelts, the father, in the anti-Semitic gypsy, driven to utter confusion by his loss and by his own dubious identity, whose figure also casts light on one of the potential psychological motives of Jewish self-hate.

Behind his characters, Hekht also draws up the image of a *shtetl* as a backdrop, using motifs familiar from earlier works of Russian-Jewish literature. One of them is the cholera wedding, a motif found in the works of Grigory Bogrov and Yakov Rombro before Hekht. It would also turn up in Ilya Ehrenburg's *Lasik Roitschwantz*, a novel with a Jewish theme but not specifically Jewish in its aspect, written a year after Hekht's novella.⁸⁶ Bogrov's treatment of the cholera wedding implied a condemnation of superstitions with a genuine *maskil* passion; Rombro put the emphasis of the grotesque elements, while Hekht's description has a tragic gravity. He outlines the whole hierarchical pecking order of richer and poorer Jews to make the deal made between them easier to understand, and to show how much Zelts, the poorest of them all, is at the mercy of the others. His first betrayal by the Jews is when the deal is overturned, and he does not get the sum he needs for opening a small shop, because they are attacked by Ukrainian soldiers going to war, who rape the bride in the cemetery. The scene does not only signify the failure of the cholera wedding, nor does it serve only to illustrate the violent anti-Semitism surrounding the Jews, but it is a major element of the plot. The arrival nine months later of their first-born, Nakhman, is expected amid grave doubts by the parents because it is not even known who the father is. "The child was named Nakhman, which means 'consoler', and he indeed consoled himself and his parents as well. He could have been born an enemy, an executioner, but he came forth as a friend and a consoler."⁸⁷ Thirteen years later the child meets the soldier who raped his mother in Petlyura's army, and Zelts actually recognizes him. The boy's fate is in the hand of this Pavlo, and he probably dies from his hand too, but certainly because of him, the man who did not give him a life but took it away from him. Life is a series of accidents; so is birth, and so is death too. "Life is a lottery game. The hand trembles when it reaches into the pot, and

⁸⁶ I mentioned in my introduction that Ehrenburg did not grow up in a Jewish environment and culture. He gathered the Jewish cultural elements and motifs that he knew from his sporadic readings or from hearsay.

⁸⁷ Hekht, S.: *Prostoi rasskaz...*, p. 43. See also Chapter "Cholera Wedding" at the end of Part I.

the heart hammers as if it had been lifted out of the body and were laying in the palm of the surgeon. Who knows what is written on the ticket? Maybe you win, maybe you lose, and then you are finished."⁸⁸ Nakhman departs from this world at a symbolic age: at thirteen he ought to have been made a man according to the Jewish ritual custom of initiation, the *bar-mitzvah*.

The magical cure by the miraculous rabbi is also an itinerant anecdote in the history of Russian-Jewish literature, read first in Bogrov's work. In Hekht's novella, the rabbi stuffs an oat-grain up the anus of the baby not only in order to display his miracle-making powers (when he is called to see the sick child, he removes the grain, and the baby instantly becomes still, as if it had been cured by the miracle). He wants to plant the idea in people's minds that Zelts was punished with the illness of his son by the Lord for his disbelief, because Zelts doubted the rabbi's prophecy that the child will be a great man, the travelling salesman of a Warsaw company when he grows up, whereas Zelts thinks he will be a poor shoemaker same as his father was. Hekht's work includes another anecdotic explanation of a custom: the one about the poles erected with the intention of prolonging the Shabbat walking distance, which are destroyed by soldiers in the Civil War, who take them for secret telegraph poles, only to be raised again by next morning by the Jews. Numerous further local anecdotes and thoughts casting light on attitudes and mentalities may be read in the novella (for instance, on the views of Jews on nudity, the hierarchy of the *shtetl*, etc.).

The protagonists of Hekht's other works display some recurrent traits quite similar to those of Nakhman, which may suggest that the author was preoccupied with certain situations, which may well have had an autobiographical background. One of these is found probably in the main character of *The Son of the Boot Maker* (1931), while Aleksandr Gordon, the twenty-year-old hero of *The Ship Sails for Jaffa and Returns*,⁸⁹ is quite decidedly a continuer of the

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 43–4.

⁸⁹ The reprint edition already quoted includes Chapters 5–13 of the novel, and the analysis is based only on that excerpt. By the testimony of the afterword, the rest of the novel is set in Birobidzhan, which, in line with the ideological prescriptions of the times, is depicted in rosy colours, whereas Palestine, as indicated by the title, is left by the hero in disappointment. The Israeli edition rather arbitrarily includes only the parts which Hekht, who never set foot in a foreign country, devotes to the description of the early Palestine years, and skips the part explaining Gordon's reasons for leaving. The storyteller's only comment on reading the letters about the Arab pogroms following the Balfour Declaration is, "What a tragic paradox! These unfortunates fled from the classical homeland of pogroms, chose to escape in the very moment when the new authorities eliminated the conditions leading to the pogroms, and ended up in Palestine which became a second Tsarist Russia for them!" Ibid., p. 169.

life of Nakhman. We are in 1921 (*The Man Who Forgot His Life* was set in 1918), and the novel relates the life of Gordon through letters written by the storyteller. Gordon's father is also a boot maker, which means he is located at the lowest rungs of the Jewish hierarchy, but his son did not make his humility his own. Like Nakhman, Gordon also suffered fits of fainting in his childhood at the sight of violence or when he was humiliated. He too compensated for his physical weakness by dreams of heroic action: when his relatives speak about the pogrom and about resistance not being "a Jewish thing," he has a fit of hysterics and cries that "he will not hide."⁹⁰ He imagines himself being Joshua and halting the sun, or David who triumphs over Goliath, and his models are the Maccabees and Iephta. Gordon also befriended a Russian girl whose father was a policeman, and whose name, for a change, was also Katya.

This childhood love in Russia is mirrored, as it were, in Palestine, where Gordon lands along with some fellow-sufferers from Odessa. This love affair, too, illustrates the gulf between cultures. "She is foreign blood. There can be no happiness with one in whose veins foreign blood flows," says Leah, the Jewish girl who also has her eye on Gordon, about her Danish rival. The duality, the choice of "nowhere" in the romantic subplot of the novel implies a trap similar to that of Zelts's being an eternal outcast in Hekht's previous work. The Danish girl is a stranger who is only out for the money, whereas Leah, the Jewish girl who is "of his own blood," is ugly to the point of being physically repellent. In this work, too, Hekht flashes up some of the typical characters of the *shtetl* like the spoilt, arrogant Madame Ashkenaz, surrounded by a host of grovelling, humiliated employees, or the itinerant private religious instructor Reb Akiba, a drunkard visiting house after house, whose eccentric figure fits well into the line of odd characters in the anecdotic tradition of Russian-Jewish literature. Gordon's travelling companions are Ilya Shukhman, an idealistic young pharmacist inclined to asceticism, and Hersh Gubler, who joined a Jewish self-defence group, axe in hand, during a Petlyurist pogrom at the age of eighteen. He got invited to a Zionist meeting after that, where he was given a simple explanation: here we are being maltreated and victimized, we have a bad deal, therefore we must return to our historical homeland. The young Zionists and *kibbutz*-builders read the works of Chernikhovsky, Jabotinsky, Yehuda Halévy, Herzl and Heine with great enthusiasm. In Gordon's fantasy "Jabotinsky is turned into Joshua, Doctor Klauzner into David, Khaim Byalik into Maccabee and Usyshkin into Iephta."⁹¹ Every now

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 222.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 173.

and then, however, quite out of the blue, Hekht puts phrases into the mouth of his hero, which, in line with the ideological requirements of the thirties, are meant to neutralize this Zionist tendency. "My compatriots left Soviet Russia not because they did not accept the revolution; on the contrary, the ideas of the revolution are very close to us. But this is where we longed to be. The revolution was unable to extinguish our national feeling." Hekht, though, plants an odd sort of patriotism into Gordon who, while walking in the desert of the Valley of Josaphat, sings praises of the Russian landscape, his childhood village, "the fields full of dandelions and bluebells." "The flowers emerging blue and yellow from his memory called up the colours and sounds of the annual autumn fairs of his village from the depths of the past. That was his genuine homeland, not the historical one."⁹² The ideological escape routes in his contradictory novel and his attempts to comply in general, however, were not enough to save Hekht from exile. He suffered his punishment basically because in 1936 he still dared to write a novel on a Jewish theme. That taught him the lesson that Jewishness was a taboo topic in Soviet literature, and after he was rehabilitated, he never tried to produce another again. He was never able to return to literature at all.

From an artistic point of view, *The Ship Sails for Jaffa and Returns* is a step backwards compared to Hekht's works written in the 1920s. The propagandistic inserts and the presumably oversize Birobidzhan chapters, on the other hand, represent a step backwards to an earlier phase within the whole of Russian-Jewish literature, because they mean that the author once again rewrote and recomposed his work according to external theoretical-ideological dictates.

Mikhail Kozakov (1897–1954)

Kozakov began to publish in 1924, even later than Hekht, but it took him less long to realize that Jewishness was a touchy topic. Even though his early work, *Nine Points* (1929–37) would be integrated later into his saga, *The Collapse of the Empire* (1956), in this second version he took good care to set the life of his protagonist, Fedya Kalmykov, a Jewish grammar school student, then a young man, primarily into the field of force of the workers' movement

⁹² Ibid., pp. 199, 203.

and the Bolsheviks in the period between 1905 and 1918. The acoustics of all this, however, was very different with him, an author who wrote about history in retrospect, than with either Aizman, who had lived through, and actually participated in the workers' movement before the revolution, or Babel, who described his own first-hand experiences and emerging doubts.

The main protagonist of *Hotel Owner Abram Nashatyr* (1926) seems to fit into the line of physically and mentally strong and healthy Jews. The author was obviously also influenced by Isaac Babel in developing his character: like Benya Krik, he is "able to satisfy a Russian woman," and would not be deterred by anything in achieving his goals. Kozakov's work, however, lacks Babel's romanticizing approach to urban crime. Nashatyr treads grimly over human destinies and dead bodies with the sole purpose of having his small hotel prosper, which he achieves on stolen money and at the cost of killing his own brother. Nashatyr places himself outside the Jewish community by his own actions; for instance, he refuses to donate for charity, which, the rabbi warns, is the same thing as not being Jewish at all. "I am not your son!" Abraham retorts offhandedly. Duped by the Soviet slogans condemning anti-Semitism, Kozakov may not have realized that the average reader might be inclined to see the figure of Nashatyr as an example of Jewish greediness rather than an embodiment of the assimilated and well-adapted Jew, and would be even less likely to discover human destiny, both universal and particular, in his character. Kozakov's stories show an attraction to the dark world of crime, murder, family revenge, prisons and people sentenced to death.

One of his strange heroes is a circus midget, whose beloved, also a midget, dies of an abortion. *Story about Midget Max, the Strolling Actor and Aizik Evseievich, the Craftsman* (1925) is a somewhat tendentious piece. Aizik almost becomes a hero for warning a Bolshevik journalist (the storyteller himself) of his impending arrest. The special interest of the story lies in the parallel through which, by setting Max, the midget, and Aizik, the Jew, side by side, the author grasps the concept of "being different," condensing the tolerance of a different lifestyle and different feelings and different thinking in the syllogism "the midget is human, too, thus the Jew is also human." In a later work he refers to his Jewish origin in an even more indirect way. He describes the "different" descent⁹³ of the strange-named Bolshevik character Adrian Mutsius as follows: "of indeterminate nationality (perhaps a Russified Greek, Romanian or Karaite who lost his roots) or he may have a mixture of all these or,

93 Kozakov, M.: *Kvartira Kuprikchaievikh* (1928).

as it happens often, simply a common Kalugan who, by a quirk of fate, got himself a funny-sounding name." In fact, the Latin name is not a bit more "funny-sounding" than that of Horace Ginzburg, the famous Jewish patron of the arts. On the other hand, it may indicate the beginning of the tendency of writers to substitute euphemisms for everything Jewish, thus obeying the rules of the taboo.

Kozakov started his career as an innovator of form. He was distinguished from contemporaries mainly by his prose language, his unusual word combinations resembling post-Symbolist prose, his unique syntactic structures, and especially by his deliberate use of the tools of creating a distance between author and text. He deliberately and skillfully employed the devices of the formalist school also when he intended to point to the survival of the problems of Jewry.

His story *The Man Who Falls on His Face* (1930) shows various facts and phenomena which he sets side by side without analysing them. First of all, Kozakov carefully avoids any description of sentiments. "In the other part of the apartment, in Miron's room, following an hour of meaningless conversation, quite unnoticed, a dialogue began, laid bare by friendship, at the end of which two people parted with a kiss instead of hitting each other in the face."⁹⁴

Kozakov employs a wide variety of means for alienating the work from its author, but his chief tool, most frequently applied, is the "revelation of the author's means" (*obnazheniie priioma*) which, along with the already mentioned "making peculiar" (*ostraneniie*), was given prominence in the 1920s by the formalist school.⁹⁵ He regularly intervenes in the narrative, makes references to plot and fable, thus developing a clearly articulated distance between himself and the text produced by him. Moreover, he does so while treating a highly sensitive and controversial topic always accompanied by passions and prejudices. These detours by the author, not lyrical but theoretical in nature, are put to the service of objectivity. Objectivity is so important for the author-storyteller that he includes a friend in the book, with whom, while his friend is reading the manuscript, they have disagreements over the Jewish question.

94 Kozakov, M.: *Chelovek, padaiushchii nits. Povesti i rasskazy*, 1930, p. 55.

95 Shklovsky's study, *Art as Method* was published first in 1917 in a collection of studies, but its second edition, in Shklovsky's own book, *The Theory of Prose* (1929), made a far greater impact. Amid the intellectual effervescence of the 1920s, the formalist school came into its own, flourished, and turned into a vogue. It is an interesting sidelight that in the same work, the method of delaying is illustrated by Shklovsky, through the example of two Jewish songs, "The Pear Will Not Drop off the Tree," and the Seder evening song "Khad-Gadia."

His friend argues that Jews really do help each other a lot, and finds them at fault for creating an antipathy in their environment. Later on he angrily protests against the literary character modelled on him, and demands to be omitted from the manuscript. The author complies: he writes that something is missing from the text at this particular point, and substitutes the omitted passages with dotted lines. Beneath this author-in-the-work, there is, of course, the real author who, rather than calming the reader, deliberately creates the opposite effect: he produces added tension.

Kozakov's novella is the only attempt after 1917, but also in the whole of Russian-Jewish literature, to show anti-Semitism for what it is by methods of this kind, without vindication, assertions, justifications and analyses. What is really important here is not *what* is described but *the way* in which it is described. The plot is deliberately simple. A very old Jewish man dies because he is scared that his kitten might run away. The concierge hates the old man so much that he kills the kitten. Of course he would prefer killing the old man if he had the courage, but he finds another object for his aggression, the cat, which act, from a literary point of view, is a murder just the same, especially as in the hate-filled mind of the concierge the kitten embodies the whole Jewish people, the old man, as well as his entire family. He is blinded not only by the desire for revenge but also by other feelings. When he sets his tomcat upon the kitten, he calls the little animal a "Jewgirl" because it evokes a memory: a failed attempt to rape a Galician Jewish woman when he was an enlisted soldier. The raping of Jewish women was not simply a horrible scene repeatedly enacted as a part of the pogroms, but, as Jean-Paul Sartre points out, represents the fundamental element of sadistic sexuality among the stereotypes of anti-Semitism.⁹⁶ Kozakov shows the primitive, instinctual mixture of revenge and frustration, and, in the transference of aggression, reveals not a simple, one-time psychological phenomenon but exposes it as a much more general validity: hidden anti-Semitism. This is no longer the age of Aizman's *Flood of Blood* with dead bodies strewn all over the streets, but one in which, officially, there is no such thing as anti-Semitism. The hooligans abusing a Jew are condemned in the factory; the "official" ideology is one of equality and full assimilation. This is also voiced by Hekht's printer: "A Jew is a working man, just the same as we are"; but Shlyoma, the beggar, who has been beaten up, but does not want to fall to the ground before the anti-Semites, also encourages himself with words to the same effect: "What ails

96 Sartre, J. P.: *Reflexions sur la question juive*, 1954. The end of Chapter 1.

them is that the Bolsheviks do not allow them to make pogroms. Well, I'm on the side of the Bolsheviks! And if he calls me a dirty Jew once again, I'll call the police and have him arrested." That is how Kozakov depicts the circumstances leading to veiled forms of anti-Semitism.

Kozakov shows three generations and three different Jewish attitudes within the Rubanovsky family and, parallel to them, three types of anti-Semitic behaviour in the characters of Miron's chief, the concierge and the author's friend, woven into the action. The concierge is an example for the survival of the instinctive elements of the primitive, old "folk" judeophobia, whereas the two members of the intelligentsia represent a new, more refined anti-Semitic theory developing partly on the new Soviet grounds.

The representative of the old world in the Rubanovsky family, Akiba dies. His grandson, Miron, is already a renegade, a "Russian culture-bearer," as his chief calls him. Miron struggles with an inferiority complex because he is Jewish, and at the same time he has guilty feelings because he is no longer Jewish. The traditions are indifferent to him; he does not sit in mourning with his father for his grandfather, and does not even understand what makes him Jewish at all. In his compromises one can discover the typical symptoms characterizing Russian intellectuals of Jewish origin, which makes him a forerunner of subsequent Jewish literary characters. It is only his Russian wife who awakens him to the fact that violence must not be suffered silently. This moral standpoint reminds one of a letter by Grigory Bogrov, from the very early period of Russian-Jewish literature, in which he wrote to Levanda that he would have left the Jews a long time ago if they were not being persecuted, but as long as they are, he cannot let them down.⁹⁷ Sixty years passed between the works of Bogrov and Kozakov.

The third type, Miron's father, Elia the taylor, represents the problems of the people in-between, the intermediate generation. He would like to stay Jewish but, as a good citizen of his country, wants equality. In the name of strict justice, he refuses to accept the cheaper prices offered to him by Jewish merchants, he is disturbed by the solidarity of Jews, and is ashamed to speak Yiddish in front of Russians. He saw persecution, and prefers to stand aside in fear, rather than making waves: "You shouldn't irritate people. You shouldn't. Better be on good terms with everyone. You mustn't quarrel. You should be as accommodating as possible. If we do so, everything will change and we will have a better life. Don't object, and everything will be all right. If you only

97 See Bogrov's letter in the second passage of the chapter on him.

knew what tact is! It's such a treasure... Don't create hostile feelings, don't evoke suspicions, Shlioma. Better smooth over everything with tact and modesty...,” he teaches the beggar. The type of the hiding, accommodating, fearful Jew, “who falls on his face,” appeared all over Europe.

Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940)

Jabotinsky devoted only a fraction of his undoubted genius to Russian-Jewish literature. Within his huge life-work, his literary output—essays, poems, novels and short stories—is almost dwarfed by his vigorous and highly practical political activity, which can only be outlined in his biography. None of the monographs written on him investigate his literary activity at any depth, which, from a certain point of view, is understandable: the primary goal of books introducing one of the “founding fathers” of the Jewish state had to be the creation of legends.⁹⁸

The sheer volume of Jabotinsky's journalistic output is highly impressive in itself, but what makes it really significant is the peculiar, irresistibly convincing style and manner which dazzled and enchanted even those who were of the opposite view. It follows from the character of my book that his ideas regarding assimilation merit a mention. According to Jabotinsky, assimilation is a way for oppressed nations to search for a way out, and, as such, it is the first stage on the road to national revival. Here he refers to parallels like the Czechoslovak Republic, born when the Germanization of Czech culture was over, or the return of India to its ancient culture after a period of Anglicization.⁹⁹ The joining of Socialist movements, the “Bund variant,” is called “Red assimilation” by Jabotinsky. He himself had gone through that period, which may be the reason why he would never make an open attack on Marxist ideology. However, he sharply criticized anybody who hoped for the solution of the Jewish question from the revolution and thought that the assertion of na-

⁹⁸ Even the single article which, at least in its title, promises an analysis of Jabotinsky's works, fails to carry out its promise: Nakhimovsky, A.: “V. Jabotinsky, Russian Writer,” *Modern Judaism* (May 1987), pp. 151–73. On Jabotinsky's journal articles in Russian, see: Markish, Sh.: “Zhabotinskii, russkii zhurnalist,” *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* XXXI/1 (1990), pp. 61–76.

⁹⁹ A lecture from 1932. I quote Jabotinsky's articles, written in seven different languages, from a Russian-language collection. Bela, M.: *Mir Zhabotinskogo*, 1992, p. 155.

tional interests and the emigration to Palestine was equal to the abandoning of revolutionary principles. Assimilation was a manifestation of the Jewish feeling of inferiority, he wrote in an article.

Jabotinsky, who was always fond of using vivid imagery in his articles, goes on: yes, it is difficult to remain inside the small and modest, poor "Jewish garden," and young people might think there is not enough to do there. Foreign streets are wider and more interesting, and when a large group is marching by, the Jews are hanging in the windows and cry after them: "wait, comrades, we will follow, too." It makes little difference whom they are following, Marx, Lenin, Gandhi, perhaps even Mussolini; the main thing is that it should be something different, not "us," something "universally human." The problem is that someone who sits in the window and hangs out farther and farther will fall out in the end. He may break every bone in his body or stay intact; in any case he will find himself outside when he comes to, lost for those staying inside.¹⁰⁰

For Jabotinsky, the Russian language became his "portable homeland." Russian was his mother tongue, his element, his virtuoso treatment of which is proven by his poetry. In a lecture about the learning of Hebrew, he wrote about this in the following way:

Russia has become foreign to almost all of us. It is now indifferent to us what future awaits it. The Russian language, however, ate itself into every bit of our minds, even though we live now in the midst of far-away nations whose language is not similar to Russian in the slightest. We automatically reach for Russian newspapers almost against our will, and prick our ears when we overhear a Russian conversation. The language has sentenced us to a life-long relationship to a people and country, the fate of which leaves us completely cold.¹⁰¹

This quote would have given a resounding answer to Saul Bellow's question, cited in the Introduction, as to why Babel did not write in Yiddish rather than Russian.

The novel *The Five* which, like all of Jabotinsky's literary work, bears the marks of its author's journalistic fervour, is nevertheless probably the most readable piece in his life-work.¹⁰² Jabotinsky puts himself in the role of the

100 Ibid., pp. 162–3. "Ego deti—i nashi," *Rassvet* (1930).

101 Ibid., p. 289. "Letniie lager'a i sviatoi iazyk," *Morgen Zhurnal*, 26 July, 1926.

102 His other large-scale saga, *Samson the Nazarite*, is a tendentious historical novel. For its title, see 4 Mos. 6:1–11; Judges 13:5–7 and 16:1.

narrator, or more interestingly, his old self, since his great shift from assimilated man of letters into militant Zionist is not referred to in the novel, the action of which takes place roughly between 1903 and 1916, and was written twenty years later, from 1934 on. That change of faith, however, is very much present, if indirectly, in the “main message” of the novel, from which it can be drawn quite readily as a conclusion almost tendentiously condensed into a single sentence, if you will. The novel illustrates Jabotinsky’s thesis that all forms of assimilation are condemned to failure through the destinies and different life stories of five siblings of a Jewish family, the Milgroms. Deliberately or not, this involves a prophecy about the decline or vanishing of Russian Jewry, since it chooses to depict the life of Odessa Jews, regarded as the vanguard of assimilation in the 19th century. By doing so, the author projects, as it were, the future: “look, this is the fate of those ahead, whom the rest want to follow; this is how people others want to emulate end up.”

The structure of the novel is very loose, conforming to the light, conversational, southern style. The story, narrated in the Odessa manner, is carried forward by encounters and by different opinions voiced in the conversations. A consequence of this “*causerie*” is that the chief element of construction is delay. (“*Causerie*,” the French term for casual conversation, is one of Jabotinsky’s pet words to describe one of the favourite genres of his journalism.)

The first member of the family whom the narrator encountered earlier is the easy-going Serezha who, much like Babel’s teenager who neglected his violin lessons, plays truant from grammar school to attend the school of life at the seaside instead. The storyteller emphasizes that Serezha is a member of the new generation, a man with practical skills, a kind of jack-of-all-trades. The preceding Jewish generations would not even know how to touch a jack-knife, much less carry one... Serezha fixes a boat, catches a fish, skins and roasts it, to become completely absorbed by the pleasures of eating a watermelon after that, like in a Nirvana. He is followed by the narrator’s admiring eyes, full of sincere envy. Serezha is a popular man about town, a sportsman and a dandy with a knack for satirical ditties. His free nature, however, turns into boundless libertinism in the end—everything is permitted after all, so what should prevent him “from doing whatever he wants?”—which would be his undoing. A charming young boy still, he first only forges the signature of his father in his school report book, and manufactures certificates for himself with the same fake signature. Later on he befriends burglars, to whom he delivers tips for money, surrendering even the apartments of his own relatives. Then he plunges into gambling, and indulges in the pleasures of three-way sex with a married woman and her daughter. He comes to a tragic end, worse than

death: he is blinded by hydrochloric acid thrown over him in revenge by the desperate husband and father. The motif of Serezha is the pendulum swinging freely from one extreme to the other, which, "...previously about to ascend into the pure radiance of the heights, now swiftly fell back into the atmosphere of street dust."¹⁰³ Jabotinsky was intrigued by the principle of "everything is permitted" not only psychologically, on the level of the individual, but also philosophically and socially, and that was from where he derived pogroms, the colonizing attitude, and even Nazism.¹⁰⁴

Through the character of Serezha, the author makes his own confession about the peculiar language of Odessa, which forms a special island of jargon even in the extreme wealth of Russian slang. The specific features of the Odessa language are not confined to odd word creations, since its stock of expressions used nowhere else in Russia is at least as rich. The peculiar charm of these expressions came in part from a Ukrainian influence, in part from calques (mirror translations) from Yiddish or from the somewhat imprecise Russian knowledge of Jews, and from the adoption of apt French turns of speech, which came down from the French population that was part of the founding generation of Odessa. In his poetically nostalgic confession, the author mentions that some of these expressions are hard to render even in Russian, then enlists and explains a couple of characteristic idioms. While introducing some secondary characters typical of the atmosphere of Odessa and in some *skaz*¹⁰⁵ passages, Jabotinsky practically frolics in the language, in verbal games and playful stylizations with full abandon. His characters Ignats Albertovich, Boris Mavrikievich and Abram Moiseevich speak naturally in images, examples and similes, also a characteristic feature of Odessa Jewish language. The lawyer, too, describes the essence of assimilation with a simile: it is like when wading into the sea, you have to first struggle across all the filth in the shallow waters at the shore.

Jabotinsky devotes even more attention to the topography of old-time Odessa, which he treats as lovingly as its language. His roaming is fuelled by nostalgia. He is not only aware that he will never return, but also that there will be nowhere to return to: the city has changed irrevocably since. He vividly

103 Jabotinsky, V.: *The Five*, trans. Michael L. Katz, 2005, p. 125. The strange triangle is reminiscent of Leon Drei's story by Yushkevich, see the chapter on Yushkevich.

104 Bela, op. cit., pp. 230–2.

105 Stylization of oral language in the lower strata of society, a term specified by formalist theory.

evokes the city's streets, traditions and famous buildings along with their histories. Each and every one of his descriptions is associated with colourful scenes, since "the splendour of our carefree, contented Odessa" is made up of both the place and the way of life of the people together. The first chapter ("Youth") is set in the Odessa Opera, almost a replica of its Viennese counterpart. A premiere here is a society event. Jabotinsky gives a captivating description of the surging emotions of the audience, the rites of success, the theatrical, staged ovation by the students, and their role in dictating tastes. It seems as if the author composed a grandiose operatic overture to the novel itself. At the end of the chapter, following the eye of the storyteller, we see Marusya applauding along with everybody else right until "the fire curtain started to descend slowly and majestically from the ceiling."¹⁰⁶ This last word is unusual, "iron curtain" may have been more appropriate, but Jabotinsky deliberately ends his overture on a note consonant with the red colour, the motif of Marusya, the vivacious redhead.

Lively, outgoing Marusya, seemingly closest in character to Serezha, is the second child of the Milgrom family whom we come to know. The narrator all but confesses his being identical with the author when he declares that there was a time when the prototype of Marusya meant a lot to him. Marusya is known all over town for her freedom of spirit and extroverted behaviour. As she herself says at the opera, "Soon there won't be a single student left on Deribasov Street who can brag that he's never kissed me."¹⁰⁷ Marusya is a "modern girl," frivolous but not immoral, driven by a kind of inner restlessness. She offers generously of her charms, swims naked in the sea at night, flirts with all the boys in town, simply because she wants to be loved by everyone. She also spreads lots of useful energy around: she tutors Jewish boys from the countryside, prevented from attending grammar school by the *numerus clausus*, for matriculation, nurses sick people, and she is the only one of the Milgroms to help the narrator when a survey is being made of the condition of poor Jews on behalf of an organization with an absurd name too long to remember or to pronounce. (The organization is actually (and parodically) called "Temporary Administration of the Society of Sanatorium Colonies and other Hygienic-Dietary Institutions for the Treatment and Education of Students Suffering from Bad Health from the Indigent Jewish Population of the City of Odessa and its Surrounding Areas." On the pretext of aid distribution

106 Jabotinsky, V.: *The Five*, p. 6.

107 Ibid., p. 5.

and health education, the organization actually provides self defence training for young Jewish men.)

To make the figure of Marusya even more intriguing and somewhat mythical, Jabotinsky uses the ploy that his narrator is infatuated with the girl; he is her secret admirer and her confidant at the same time. There is an erotic game going on between them, carried to the point where Marusya, already a married woman by then, actually climbs into his bed to tell her confession about herself. The narrator witnesses when the girl almost marries a dashing Russian naval officer, only to decide differently in the last moment. Her path is the opposite of that of Serezha, because she proceeds from libertinism to the "correct" direction. She picks her husband from among her pupils. People think she ought to marry in the same way as her mother did once: Milgrom called the attention of his father-in-law to-be to himself only because he had the good sense to take some food for a train journey. He was instantly invited to his future father-in-law's house, who was ready to marry his daughter to Milgrom. Like in a Jewish anecdote! Marusya's husband, a purposeful small-town pharmacist, is enshrouded in the same mysteriousness and inexplicability as is their marriage and love life. Samoilo is too decent, too forgiving, too reliable; his actions calculable, his efforts at hiding his feelings clumsy. Jabotinsky surrounds his small-town "authentic"¹⁰⁸ Jewish positive hero with a kind of sentimental glory, though made more interesting by the addition of some "anti-heroic" features (Samoilo is badly-dressed, shabby, his appearance is unkempt and his face wrinkled).

Marusya is a perfect housewife and mother, or at least she makes every effort to be one. Still, her volatile moods and the letter she writes summoning the narrator to see her indicate that all is not well. The role undertaken is too heavy for her, and despite all her efforts, the small town oppresses her, and she is bored. Jabotinsky chooses a mythically spectacular and horribly painful death for her: death by fire. Her flowing dress catches fire from a flame on the kitchen stove, and she burns to death in the inferno engulfing the kitchen. The writer quotes eyewitnesses who recall how she pushed the children out of the burning kitchen, and no one understands why she failed to escape herself. As if she had sacrificed herself on the altar of the family hearth. In retrospect, the reader discovers several hints leading to the motif of the fire consuming Marusya. Serezha met his end in the depths, while Marusya dies in a fire as if

108 J. P. Sartre's term, see *Reflexions sur la question juive*, 1954.

sacrificed, thus she remains eternally young, just as she would have wanted to remain.

Marko searches eternally for new paths; he is aimlessness itself. He is a kind of intellectual flirt, with brief but passionate stints at oriental languages, university studies, revolutionary movements, only to land finally in the rented room of a former prostitute. He is also accorded a symbolic death by the author. One day he hears a cry for help from the direction of the frozen Neva River, and as always when he hears a new call, begins to walk toward the sound, until he simply disappears. He is never seen by anyone again. In any case, Jabotinsky has a strong predilection for the tool of "symbolic" solutions like those ending the lives of Marusya and Marko, but at the same time he also exposes his own method in the novel. He thoroughly describes what kind of death he imagines for Marusya's rejected lover, the Russian naval officer. He tells how, from what newspaper report, and in what style, he "learned" about the suicide of the rejected officer, but after having laid it all out in detail, he continues: "In fact, of course everything happened not at all the way I 'dreamed' it. Aleksei Dmitrievich was too decent a man to associate his departure from life in such an obvious way with Marusya... four months later the telegraph agency informed us of his accidental death somewhere en route to Bombay—he was washed overboard in a storm."¹⁰⁹ It all sounds as a kind of warning from the author: "this is how I make up lives and fates, and this is how they should be understood. It is all up to me."

Lika, the other daughter walks into the dead-end street of the workers' movement with increasingly determined steps. Her tormented character combines the resoluteness of Russian women (like the wives following their Decembrist husbands to exile in 1825) and literary heroines with the insecurity of Jews who lost their way. Fragile and puritanical, combining a subdued sensuality, beauty and oversensitivity with cruelty and an unprincipled callousness, Lika walks down corridors in a way so as to avoid being touched by anyone coming from the opposite direction, and would never even shake hands with anybody. Nevertheless, she chooses a fate where all she can expect is beatings, torture, prison and exile. She chews her nails all the time. She takes part in underground party organizations, then betrays the party, and next it is revealed that she only went to spy for the opposed party in which, however, she falls sincerely in love with the informer whose job is the surveillance of Russian emigrants. While living with him, she nevertheless hands over all his

¹⁰⁹ *The Five*, p. 129.

information and secrets to her own party. The novel takes farewell from her in a cell of the Lubyanka prison.

The most colourless of the Milgroms is Torik, the youngest son, who is preparing systematically and diligently for the future, with all the required endurance, his immaculate honesty and modest elegance making him appear as a pillar of the family, the much hoped-for "successor to the throne." After the death of Marusya, immediately before admittance to the university, he makes another logical move in the interest of his career: out of purely rational considerations he converts to Christianity. Jabotinsky depicts Torik as cold-blooded, aloof, and repulsive in his honesty. The blinding of Serezha and the fiery death of Marusya, these two "hot" deaths, were somehow managed by the parents, but Torik's decision, equal to a "cold" death, is the last blow, which the mother cannot bear. Like Niobe, she lost all her children, of whom she was so proud, suddenly, due to violent death. With the mythical Niobe metaphor Jabotinsky raises the eventful plot to a higher, more abstract plain, exposing its mythical dimensions of a universal validity, associated mainly with the fate of Russian Jews.

The history of Russian-Jewish literature began with the advocates of assimilation, and ends almost symbolically with two authors, one an opponent of assimilation (Jabotinsky), and the other its victim (Babel). They died in different spots of the world, at its opposite poles, one might say, in the same year, 1940, which may be considered as marking the end of Russian-Jewish literature.

1929, Stalin's "year of great change," was also a negative turning point for Jewish culture, signalling the beginning of the decline of Russian-Jewish literature. As we have seen Isaac Babel falling silent, the same year also determined the last of the dually bound Russian-Jewish writers. The story *Karl-Jankel*, written in 1931, already struck a fundamentally false note when it attempted to portray Jews as fully integrated into the Soviet world. Babel was not the only one falling silent, indicating that there must have been also other reasons for the ceasing of Russian-Jewish literature. Those falling silent—at least in their capacity as Russian-Jewish writers—included also Samuil Marshak along with several authors described in this book: Hekht, Kozakov and Kipen. According to Shimon Markish, they lost the ground from under their feet, the ground which was their subject, and which nourished them.¹¹⁰ Their readers vanished, merging into the primitive uniformity of false egalitarianism. During

¹¹⁰ Markish, Sh.: "La culture russo-juive. Pourquoi? Pour qui?" *Cahiers de la Faculté des Lettres*, Genève, 1995, pp. 49-56.

the twenties, Zionist and Hebrew-language culture was forcibly eliminated, and in the thirties, Jewish literature written in Russian dissolved in Soviet literature written in Russian. For Yiddish literature it took somewhat longer to fall victim to the system.

Russian-Jewish literature began in Odessa, with Osip Rabinovich and the dream of assimilation, and Odessa is also where the story ends. This is the place where Babel came from, and which he wrote about, and it is also the scene of Jabotinsky's *The Five*, which, for its own part, exposes the dead-end-streets where the same utopia was leading to. Our historical overview closes with Russian-Jewish literature returning to the starting point of its cycle, the point where the snake bites its own tail.

A look forward: Friedrich Gorenstein (1932–2002)

The last Russian-Jewish writer, or more exactly the last who may be regarded as such (a Lithuanian Jew writing in Russian) was probably Grigory Kanovich, who emigrated to Israel in 1993, but he wrote exclusively about subjects of the past, a bygone world. Friedrich Gorenstein, the first author to define himself as a Jewish writer on a new ground (the term “unbroken ground” may be more appropriate) came from deep below, and arrived into literature the hard way. Due to his sadly typical Soviet life story, his road to Russian-Jewish literature was long and tortuous. He was born in Kiev. His father was a professor of economy, arrested and executed in 1935. His mother went into hiding from the persecutions, and was constantly on the run until she died in 1941 during the city's evacuation. As a child, Gorenstein first lived with relatives, then in orphanages. The turbulent experiences of his troubled childhood all found their way into his work later on. After finishing school Gorenstein got a job as an unskilled worker, then studied at an academy for the mining industry, and worked as a miner and as a mining engineer in the Urals and all over Ukraine, settling in Kiev in 1961. His literary career began with film scenarios, and his other work was hardly published at all. It is owing to this that Gorenstein is much better known in Russia and abroad as a screen writer than as an author in his own right. His work for cinema includes scenarios of world-wide successes, like Andrei Tarkovsky's famous *Solaris* (1972) and *Prisoners of Love* (1975), a film directed by Nikita Mikhalkov.

The Winter of '53 (1965, published in 1978) is set in the Kafkaesque world of a Soviet mining town, an allegory of the Stalinist inferno, and its topic is seemingly not Jewish. However, the unusual first name of the main protagonist, Kim, a naive young man, indicates his being different, and this is the reason why he is being taunted by the Jew-haters, even though all he betrays about his origin is that he comes from far away (and his name is, paradoxically, a typically Soviet monstrosity, a Mosaic word coming from the initials of *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional Molod'ozhi*, the Young Communist International). Still, it is enough to make him a target of rude anti-Semitic attacks. On the basis of his life, the boy is identical with the child hero of *A Building with a Little Tower*, whose mother dies in the course of evacuation in the hospital of one of the stations, leaving her small son alone in the midst of hostile and selfish strangers (see pp. 229–230). In this earlier story, Gorenstein strictly adheres to the world of his main character, and his portrayal remains within the confines of the child's eye view, the characteristics of which will be discussed in this book in connection with Babel's stories as a basic pattern of Jewish life—nature of assimilation. Kim, too, is childish, because he is naive, unsuspecting, with not enough knowledge even about himself. His condition of being at the mercy of others is in a sharp contradiction with his environment. A pariah many times over, he grew up in an orphanage, and was expelled from university already in the first year because of a carelessly dropped critical remark. It looks like he never learned to live. His sense of inferiority, hunger for love, his loneliness and his acute tendency to experience any form of normal social intercourse as a difficult problem to be suffered, must have appeared all too pathological for the censor to let it pass. Kim's being an outsider is a guarantee of a pure inner life in the frozen, snow-covered scenery of the mining town, a vast, desolate concrete desert with unfortunates and people turned evil walking about aimlessly. Kim naively hands his full earnings to a stranger begging for a loan on the street, halts worshipfully over the bed of Katya, when his instinctive desire drives him to the girl's room one night. He suffers even the smallest bit of shame as physical pain, and even lies sometimes to call attention to himself. He is bound by his hallucinations to a different world, whose call he sometimes feels. It is virtually inevitable that he should end up in the clutches of authority. Kim is never called Jewish openly by the author. "What sort of a name is that? Jewish? Or Armenian?" he is asked. When Kim gets up the courage to protest, he is instantly assailed: "Well, all right, you just stop all this Jerusalem rubbish; enough of this Armenian stuff... if you don't like it, go sell shoelaces... Sissy... 'I am not Armenian,' Kim con-

tinued, disgusted with himself all the time, nauseated by every word he said, 'and I am not Jewish either... I can show you my documents.'" ¹¹¹ It is not made clear whether Kim is Jewish or not, but his shame speaks for itself. Speaking about his having been sacked from university, he again attempts to distance himself from the Jews. "One of the instructors began to pick on me... Called me a cosmopolitan... What kind of a cosmopolitan could I be... I hate those cosmopolitans myself." ¹¹² Kim's inner insecurity reminds one of the dubious attitude witnessed in Isaac Babel's diary, when the author (using a Russian pseudonym) talks about Jews in a negative way, and refuses to admit even to himself that he is one of them. Still, Kim is continually followed by the Jewish context. His nightmare about a death camp, for instance, fills a whole page. He sees naked bodies in a pit with soldiers with metal helmets over them; Kim runs and is being chased, and he only runs because he knows he would be burned in a gas chamber. Gorenstein associates his hero with Jewishness in a hidden manner, through allusions, by creating a Jewish subconscious for him. The author goes on using a variety of euphemism for Jews: they are called Khazars, Armenians, French, or even "Jerusalem Cossacks" by the characters. Similar manifestations of hidden anti-Semitism were seen earlier in the pages of Kozakov's work, *The Man Who Falls on His Face*, as well as in Hekht's novella *The Man Who Forgot His Life*.

The majority of Gorenstein's works are attempts to deal with Russian anti-Semitism in two senses of the term "deal with": they not only try to describe the historical facts but also to cope with those facts, to come to terms with it all in psychological terms. One of the thematic focuses, Gorenstein's main theme, is Nazi-occupied Ukraine. *Penance* (1967, published in 1969) is set in the last months of World War II, but it is the peculiar story of a love affair. A young lieutenant returns home from the front to find that his Jewish family was beaten to death with bricks by the people of the Russian village, their body thrown unburied into a pit. The real question behind the exhumation is not how this could have happened, as the murder did not take place at the instigation of the Germans and the people of the village let their own hatred loose, but whether revenge would make any sense at all? When is the Biblical

111 Gorenstein, F.: "Zima 53-go," *Kontinent* 17 (1978), p. 39.

112 Ibid., p. 55. Ever since Stalin's showdown launched at the end of the 1940s, targeting Jews and eliminating prominent Jewish intellectuals in the guise of a "campaign against cosmopolitanism," the word "cosmopolitan" served as a euphemism for "Jewish" in the Soviet Union.

measure reached? When all victims have been avenged, and there is no more "eye for an eye"? Can there be forgiving, and can such sins be expiated? The play *Berdichev* (1975, published in 1980) portrays Russians and Jews living side by side in hatred, and does so in a highly differentiated manner. The mustering of the different types of anti-Semitic Russians and the different life solutions of Russians on the way to assimilation is followed by debates, already in Moscow, in which the standpoint of the opposing parties not only remains as far away from each other as it ever was but does not even become subtler. Gorenstein himself cannot suggest a solution; he only indicates that Jewish culture is vanishing, Yiddish language is dying out, and the desire for assimilation leads toward Russification. Gorenstein's dramas, especially *Debates on Dostoevsky* (1973), appear to be works meant to be read rather than staged.

In *Travelling Companions* (1983), published also in English,¹¹³ using a ploy frequent in Russian literature, Gorenstein allows a Ukrainian peasant to speak throughout a long journey by train. While the train traverses the Ukraine east to west, the entire turbulent history of the country comes alive through the old man's narrative, from the anti-Semitic nationalist leader Bogdan Khmelnytsky, the "inventor" of pogroms—who, in a pact made with Russia in the mid-17th century, "handed over Ukraine as a gift to the future superpower"—to the mass murder of Jews in World War II, in which, besides the local collaborationist militia, also the *politsai*, consisting of anti-Semitic Ukrainians, had their share.

The large novel *Psalm* (written in 1975, published in French in 1984, and in Russian in 1986,¹¹⁴ though the latter edition was also first published in Munich and appeared in Russia only in 1993), consists of five chapters. Each one is a moral fable, the first about a lost brother, the next about the torments of sinners, the third about lust, the fourth about the sickness of the spirit, and the fifth about the broken chalice. The chapters, each representing a period in the history of the Soviet Union, are connected by the figure of Dan, the Antichrist descended to earth. In Gorenstein's peculiar interpretation of the Bible, the Antichrist is not the antagonist or adversary of Christ, but his brother who, after the defeat of the Redeemer and the Prophet of Love, came to earth to punish the guilty, in order "to fulfill the Divine Law," because "for the persecutors, Christ is the Redeemer, so for the persecuted the Redeemer is the Antichrist." The author lets his narrator and some of his characters speak in the language of the prophets, especially in that of Jeremiah and Isaiah damn-

113 Gorenstein, F.: *Travelling Companions*, trans. Bernard Meares, 1991.

114 Gorenstein, F.: *Psalm. Roman-razmyshleniie o chetyriokh kazniakh gospodniakh*, 1986.

ing the sins of the time of the Babylonian captivity and seeing visions of the future. The work is permeated with Biblical language, making it clear that Gorenstein sees the 20th century as an integral part of the story beginning with the Creation and continuing with the history of the Jews as described in the Old Testament. "Every life and every destiny must be arranged in a Psalm to praise the Lord, because they have been realized, unlike unfulfilled destinies and unborn lives, which have not."

The first destiny is that of Maria, the girl turning from innocent into prostitute during the great hunger of 1933, which made people and conditions cruel and heartless, who delivered Dan's first child before her death. The second belongs to Annushka, childishly ignorant, drifting from crime into suffering as she is transported from Ukraine to Germany in 1941, where she dies. The next time Dan reappears is in 1948, in the oppressive world of a Russian village, where we see him bringing up Ruth-Pelageia, a girl with prophetic abilities, saved from the Germans, as his own daughter. He begets his second child in the heat of peasant passions. In the sixties, Dan's children seek for ideals and principles to direct their lives amid the new religiousness of the intelligentsia and mystical roads. The suicide of one of the brothers and the deep search for truth and justice of the other is another embodiment of the Christ-Antichrist duality. The novel ends with a strange anti-Trinity: Pelageia, the Orthodox Christian prophetess expecting Dan's child buries Dan together with his grown son, thus Dan ends his earthly path in peace.

Gorenstein's portrayals and stories are broken up every now and then by ethical, philosophical and religious treatises and essays on Russian history, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and the Gospels. Author and narrator are hard to separate in his emotionally charged analyses. The narrator himself often speaks in the language of the Bible, quoting it literally at times. Even though Gorenstein describes the action, taken in a narrower sense, from different perspectives and a different basic tone in the various chapters, the common element which connects them is this rolling, broad stream of essayistic-narrative speech by the author-storyteller. "The Biblical style is meant to avoid being too easily understood, because an all too easily understood language is the language of slogans," he explains in the novel. The highly individual treatment of Biblical stories is a boldly extended variant of the kind of creative re-writing or overwriting employed by Lev Lunts.

Gorenstein selects some of the major turning points of Soviet history to look at the problems. However, he seeks the origin of all ills on a philosophical level, at the cultural springs from which Europe, and indeed, the Mediterranean world, stem from. Christianity, he believes, was the child of Judaism,

but was given a new face by Greeks living in the closed world of monasteries, and was separated from its origins for good by the Middle Ages. The extreme emphasis on the divine, heavenly descent of Christ leads inevitably to atheism. In Russia, the tower of Babel of those aspiring to overthrow the rule of God was being built for four centuries, and the threat came to fulfillment in the period of Stalinism, the children of which cannot recover from its consequences even in the next generation.

In the novel *The Place* (written originally between 1969 and 1972, but completed by the author in 1976) one such "child" of Stalinism recalls his life's quests for the right path. The chapters of the nearly thousand page long novel cover the tortuous road from the protagonist's fight for a meagre place in a workers' hostel to the peaks of his career. Gosha Tsvybishev is an orphan. His father perished in a camp, his mother dies, and his character is torn between near-pathological extremes of hunger for love and aggression. He seeks obsessively for a way out of the trap of the pariah-existence of the outcast. His first great campaign is the battle fought in the labyrinths of bureaucracy for the profit to be gained from the rehabilitation of his father (at the end of the fifties), but in the meantime he already cherishes a Napoleonic ambition to become the leader of Russia one day. For the sake of fulfilling that ambition, he seeks contact with illegal organizations, and then he establishes one himself. He steers between rival but equally anti-Stalinist circles of Slavophile anti-Semites and Trotskyites, serving his own interests, until he arrives at the next logical move in the game: serving the KGB. With this negative *Bildungsroman*, Gorenstein produced a 20th century ordinary-day Soviet *Devils* (Dostoevsky), portraying the development of maniacs obsessed with ideals, leading to dangerous political games. The outlines of all the impasses which would characterize Russian life at the end of the 20th century already emerge quite clearly from the novel: survivors of camps and prisons now living in misery are looking for political platforms where they could vent their anger, going full circle in their rage, from Trotskyism through Russian nationalism to terrorist movements idolizing Hitler, until extreme left and extreme right converge, and begin to plan pogroms and assassinations. Gorenstein bestows an extraordinary narrative talent upon his protagonist, who reveals himself in first person singular as the archetypal Russian "common man," losing his identity and turning, in his own eyes, into a raging "superman" in his sense of inferiority and impotent rage, a type mass-produced by Russian history and the heritage of Stalinism.

Another of Gorenstein's frequently portrayed types is the terrified intellectual of Jewish descent, who changes his name, pulls his head in his shoulder, and, fearing for his career, is always compliant and subservient, just to avoid

being exposed as being non-Russian. "IU," the protagonist of *Champagne with Bitter Anger* (1986), whose name is substituted with a single character, moves ahead in life at the cost of giving up a piece of himself every time his career advances just a tiny bit. The Yom-Kippur War of 1973 breaks out during his summer holiday spent in the Crimea, and the stifling mood of anti-Semitism is only aggravated by the inciting and deliberately distorted reports of Soviet television on the war. The scene and the subject recall Chukovskaya's *Descent* (1972, samizdat), but the narrator's position is fundamentally different. Gorenstein's protagonists saw thirty years more of Soviet history first hand, and lost their integrity in consequence of the pressure of the hooded forms of open anti-Semitism. He still remembers that in 1967, during the Six Day War, "the news that the Soviet Union broke diplomatic relations with Israel echoed triumphantly from loudspeakers strung up all over Gorky Street, accompanied by threats. Israel was being hated with the kind of sincere enthusiasm due to the enemy within, and the all-over mood was reminiscent to that of football matches," Gorenstein writes. Iu is very much aware of his self-deception; he has nowhere to escape to, and when he secretly toasts Israel's victory with champagne, as if to seal his identity, he is instantly hit in the face by the eternal tendency of Jews to make compromises, their blindness and cowardice through the words of a fellow sufferer. David says that he cannot take it any more, and will emigrate to Germany, of all places; his father-in-law once served in a Lithuanian SS unit, so he is officially entitled to leave the country together with his family... No one is spared by Gorenstein, whichever side he or she is on, as he keeps pondering the question as to how the people of the Bible could turn into a lost people. His answer essentially is that Jewry is also at fault because of its loss of national feeling and its incorrect self-evaluation.

The satirical character of *Spark* (1948) unfolds gradually: the movie director shooting a film about Lenin tries to hypnotize himself into deep philosophical thoughts, viewing Lenin naively as a symbol of the fight against Stalinism, a kind of Chekhovian character, and runs to the surviving veterans who still knew Lenin personally, for inspiration. It is only when he is completely alone that he feels some pangs of conscience, but only vaguely. The evening party of Moscow intellectuals ends in a burlesque-type spate of destruction, with the director Leikin and his anti-Semitic colleague, who calls Lenin the tsar of the Jews, fighting it out on the street in the end. The short story provides an opportunity for the author to give a brief overview of the fate of Russian Jews after 1917. They shot into the first ranks of Soviet leadership by their revolutionary Messianism, from where, however, they were dislodged ten

years later, only to be replaced by mediocre bureaucrats so that Russia could be completely taken over by the rule of the "Tartar Mamai state of being, Stalinism-Dzhughashviliism."

Dresden Passions (1993), set at the 1882 Dresden international anti-Semitic congress, is actually a pamphlet.

Deprived of the opportunity to publish, Gorenstein was forced into exile in 1980. Of his life work, only the part written at home in the Soviet Union is really interesting from the point of view of the alternatives offering themselves to the continuation of Russian-Jewish literature. This was by no means an organic continuation. Gorenstein grew up as an orphan, yet he consciously remained inside, or found his way back to, Jewishness. However, there was no longer a community backing him, which he would represent culturally and from a civilization point of view. For him, Jewish identity was equal to facing up to (not even confronting) the Russian identity (see, for instance, the New Testament motifs). Instead of the possibility of representing something from inside, what remained for him was the emphasis on deviation, on being different, an outcast, along with disguised, euphemistic signals, and confrontation without the backing of a community.

His life work is proof to the fact that Russian-Jewish literature could not be continued in the Soviet Union. What could emerge after the era of amnesia was something different, something new, raised on a different ground. Gorenstein was a Russian writer (of the Soviet era) because the community which he attempted to represent had disappeared from behind him. The sum total of his work is a pathography of the Soviet Union, not the literature of a community.

In the wake of the waves of emigration of the 1970s and even more the collapse of the Soviet Union, the "literary" presence of the community was relocated to Israel to an increasing degree. Israeli literature written in Russian is an altogether different, peculiar phenomenon with little awareness of the one-time Russian-Jewish literature investigated in this book. It is hard to establish whether it is seen as an antecedent at all. In any case, where literary kinship must be sought is not the chronology but much rather the motifs, themes and fundamental patterns. And this literary kinship connects the authors discussed in my book to all the literatures of Jewish assimilation; first and foremost to that in the United States and Central Europe. But they are also akin to all authors with a dual identity, for whom this means the riches of two cultures rather than a split state of mind. And let us add: the tolerance of duality in measuring things against each other provides a view of the world that is a *sine qua non* of artistic sensibility and an open intellectual attitude alike.

V. A PATTERN OF NARRATIVE IN JEWISH ASSIMILATION LITERATURE. THE CHILD'S EYE VIEW—ISAAC BABEL IN A RUSSIAN-JEWISH, AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN LITERARY CONTEXT. A COMPARATIVE CONCLUSION^{1, 2}

As a conclusion, I propose a special addendum on a peculiar feature, a phenomenon which seems, at the same time, to be the most outstanding achievement of the Jewish literature of assimilation: the narrative method of the child's eye view, reflecting the dual identity of generations of assimilation. Russian-Jewish literature was the first to develop the forms putting the problem of assimilation into a universal context, formulating and describing thereby the characteristic experience of identity search and multiculturalism, both of them fundamental issues crucial to this very day. The closing chapter of my book attempts to define the substance of this innovation by focusing on the works of Isaac Babel, whose oeuvre I regard as the peak achievement of Russian-Jewish literature. After summing up Babel's Russian-Jewish literary predecessors (discussed in detail earlier) on whose work Babel was able to build upon, the chapter also maps out who Babel's successors and followers were in world literature. These world literary links, some of which can be followed up to this day, are living proof that Russian-Jewish literature, a blank area uncharted before, can be, with absolute justice, considered a phenomenon constituting a trend or line of world literature important in its own right.

The irresolvable contradiction between keeping his loyalty as well as his reserve is the single most important, fundamentally characteristic feature of Babel's oeuvre as a whole. The simultaneousness of the external and internal

¹ Written on the basis of the paper I presented at a conference entitled "The Enigma of Isaac Babel" at Stanford University in February 2004. I dedicated my essay to Shimon Markish, who had also been invited to the conference but could no longer attend: he had died two months earlier. I spoke many times to him about this idea of mine, and he insisted that I should write it one day.

² This is the author's own English text, revised and touched up by the translator of this book (translator's note).

viewpoint combining his Jewish and Soviet identity, the ambiguity of deeply felt affection on the one hand and the aloofness of the reserved, critical outsider on the other—this tension is prominently observable in *Red Cavalry*, *Odessa Tales* and the best short stories alike.

The question I wish to raise here is the following: what is the place of the “childhood” stories³ in the writer’s dual world, what was his “method” of focusing the narrative when employing the child’s point of view?⁴

“Childhood. At Grandmother’s”

In Babel’s early short story *Childhood. At Grandmother’s* (1915),⁵ the antithetical commands of “flee from it and remain for ever” are actually repeated three times by the young storyteller: at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the story: “The room was hot and stuffy, and this always made me depressed and feel I wanted to escape to freedom.” “The heat in the room kept increasing... At that moment all seemed extraordinary to me and made me want to flee from it and yet remain for ever.” “I cannot breathe, there is nothing to breathe, I must run outside into the fresh air, into freedom, but I have no strength to raise my dropping head.”

Babel found the perfect dual antitheses—“binarity” in Bakhtin’s terminology—for his main message: “room” and “outside,” “escape” and “freedom,” “flee” or “remain,” “hot-stuffy” and “fresh-cool.” This method of binarity is most successful when the author does not assume the role of “omniscient” narrator but creates a distance by using the narrow focus of a hero. (An example for a wrongly chosen angle of narration, in contrast, is Karl-Jankel.) Babel’s very first short story, *Old Shloyme*, already “narrows down” the scope of vision of the narrative: Shloyme is not only old, a condition limiting his

3 Babel’s childhood stories are not at all autobiographical in spite of the fact that *The Story of My Dovecot* has a note in the first edition (*Krasnaia Nov’*, May 1924): “This story is the beginning of an autobiographical novel.” Some facts from the stories have been mistakenly taken for genuine evidence not only by some otherwise fine papers on Babel (Lionel Trilling) but even in encyclopaedias.

4 I will discuss only *Childhood. At Grandmother’s* (*Literaturnoe Nasledstvo* 74 [1965], pp. 483–8, dated Saratov, 12 November, 1915); *The Story of My Dovecot* (1924, see above); *First Love* (*Krasnaia Nov’*, January 1925); *In the Basement* (*Novyi Mir*, October 1931, with the date of 1929); and *Awakening* (*Molodaia Gvardiia* 17–18 [1931]). Most collections of Babel’s works cover 8 pieces in the group of childhood or “autobiographical” stories.

5 Babel, I.: *Collected stories*, trans. David McDuff, 1994, pp. 22, 24, 26–7. Further quotations refer to this edition, with the page numbers in brackets.

field of interest and competence, but is also physically confined to the town, and later to the house itself, that is, his scope of movement is also limited. In this way Babel passes reality through a special filter: the reader is informed of phenomena observed by the old Jew only, and is left to draw his own conclusions regarding the changes going on outside Shloyme's world.

The same "narrowing down" of the field is also employed as a method in the childhood stories, but while the old man has already lost his scope of vision, the child has not yet developed it. In *The Story of my Dovecot* and *First Love* the horrors of the pogrom are shown indirectly, only to the measure of their influence on the child's life. From the perspective of the child the pogrom appears as an event of secondary importance, and the non-objective narrative approach, seemingly diminishing the pogrom, actually makes it psychologically more significant and tragic in the reader's eye. Babel handles History with a capital "H" in the same way in *Red Cavalry*: the war, the actual battle, is not at all shown, as if it were only a backdrop for the narrator's duality and his problems. The same technique was already employed by Aleksander Kipen in *At the Crossroads* (1910). Kipen describes the soldiers and officers killing time at the outskirts of town, near a little synagogue, but at a distance from where the pogrom rages. Only its noises are heard and the tension is visible in the reactions and the faces of different people—soldiers, officers, passers-by.⁶

In Babel's short story *First Love* the boy witnesses his father humiliating himself before a Cossack officer. What fascinates him, though, is the new and interesting visual information: he admires the Cossack on horseback, his elegant uniform, his reserved indifference, his masculine beauty. The same dissonant approach is present in the description of a young peasant smashing up the house of the boy's uncle, or in a "fine" woman (in Russian: "with a beautiful face"), carrying home things looted from a ruined Jewish shop. The child's impartial look is not yet able to separate the enemies from the friends—the "objective" physical beauty existing in itself arouses his admiration.

Besides Kipen, a predecessor of Babel, one might also mention two successors who also employ this method. In his *Building with a Little Tower*, Friedrich Gorenstein also uses the child's eye view and his *Weltanschauung* (in the proper meaning of the German philosophical term) to depict the horrors of the evacuation. The Jewish boy whose mother dies during the evacuation is unable to determine the practical moves needed for survival. He perceives unnecessary, irrelevant details in the town, sees the tower on top of a building

6 Cf. Hetényi, Zs.: "Pasyunki Rossii. Motivы marginal'nosti v proizvedeniakh F. Gorensteina," *Revue des études slaves* LXXV/1 (2004), pp. 141–55.

again and again, but he misses his bus and loses his fish and bread, his only food for the day, and relies on malevolent people who swindle him. The child's lack of visual concentration turns him into a victim, a role that psychologically provokes the reader's emotional participation. At the same time, the tower on top of the house becomes a symbol of lost home, the cosy hideaway of fairy tales, so different from the real world.⁷

In the short story *Pogrom* (in *Early Grief*) Danilo Kiš portrays a Jewish boy left alone in the street at the end of the pogrom with a packet of noodles in his hand. It was given to him by a nice lady who kindly shared her loot with him after having robbed a Jewish shop. The boy is utterly confused as to what to do: whether he should take the noodle home, or better throw it away? Danilo Kiš employs Babel's "binarity" regarding "staying" and/or "fleeing," but also adds new dimensions: what are the criteria of participation and betrayal, what is the right conduct from the point of view of survival?

In the child's mind, objects and phenomena are transformed into images rather than into concepts or ideas. The child contemplates phenomena but does not understand them in the same way as grown-ups; that is why he finds unusual connections and relationships between them. This intuitive, or, from a certain aspect, deeper understanding provides a new interpretation. Babel describes the details of his native town as follows: "I was firmly convinced that in them I could see the principal thing, the secret thing, what we grown-ups call the essence of the things" (p. 21). The "essence" may mean the hidden secret that opens only to the artist's eye, and can never be defined by words, only by an inner vision. Here I shall merely touch upon a problem of literary continuity which makes us understand how closely Babel's ornamental prose is connected with the Symbolists, their theory of the "hidden secret" of the world, and the Russian prose of the 1910s, even more closely perhaps than the work of Pilnyak who is considered to be a direct follower of the ornamental prose stream launched by A. Bely.⁸

⁷ This ploy is far from self-evident. The opposite solution is found in David Aizman's *Flood of Blood* (1906). Aizman does not as yet unify the two elements, the "child's eye" view and the objective focus. The child, a girl raped and killed in front of her father, is an innocent victim only (a very old pattern to draw sympathy from the reader)—and the handsomeness of the young lad, enthusiastically participating in the pogrom, the festive atmosphere in the streets, is shown by the author's voice.

⁸ The symbolist concept of the child as possessor of secret knowledge and language without words is elaborated in Bely's *Kotik Letaeu*; not without influence for Pasternak's *Luvers's Childhood*.

The reason a child does not make logical connections between phenomena is not only due to a lack of necessary background knowledge or practical information, but also because his or her character is still unstable. With a self-identification not yet fully established, hence the impartiality; without an adult's preferences and distinctions, and the hierarchy of values is not yet developed either. This unstable self-identification is an absolutely crucial feature of child heroes in the Jewish literature of assimilation, because the choices open to the child, and leading towards a new self-determination or identity, stand metaphorically for those of the people at a crossroads, the child's duality reflects the people's ambiguous self-evaluation.

A different aspect of what may be called childish logic is employed in the story *Gedali in Red Cavalry*. Gedali, the old shopkeeper stubbornly sticks to a highly simplified, bi-polar thinking of "yes"-es and "no"-s, of "good" and "bad" (see Bruno Bettelheim's theory of the polarity of child's thinking later). The wise old man's Talmudic philosophy and the naive simplicity of the child overlap here to express a common yearning for order in the chaotic world of real life—*ordo ab chaos*.⁹ Babel integrates these contrasting qualities into his textual structures by the important semantic and linguistic technique of *parataxis*.

Catalogue and images, images and parataxis, parataxis and tolerance

The child's eye view allows the author to set things side by side that are otherwise irreconcilable. This psychological parataxis is the starting point for the ambiguous feelings of the assimilated Jewish boy – he wants to escape from his grandmother and to stay forever at the same time. He does not suppress his negative impressions of his grandmother, nor does he keep his admiration for the elegant power of the Cossack humiliating his father under control.

Later, in *Red Cavalry*, Babel lends the same ambiguity to his narrator, Lyutov. He looks at the Cossack officers with a teenager's admiration (*My First Goose*, *The Konzapas Commander*), and wishes to be one of them, yet at the same time he is also frightened of them. This time the doubtfulness of Lyutov is meant to mirror the relevant attitude of the hesitant intelligentsia,

⁹ For a detailed analysis of Gedali, see my article: Hetényi, Zs.: "Lavka vechnosti (K motivnoi strukture rasskaza *Gedali* I. Babel'a.)" *Studia Slavica Hung.* 36 (1989), pp. 187–92.

“childish” in its inability to establish its true preferences. This apparent hesitation and childishness, however, are also seen as positive features: those of human tolerance as opposed to the thoughtless, cruel choices and indeterminate system of values of the merciless Cossacks.¹⁰ (I shall return to this later.)

Duality is reflected visually in the description of the belongings of the rabbi’s young son, an emblematic figure symbolizing the coexistence—instead of confrontation—of the Jewish tradition on the one side, and the revolution on the other: “Here everything was dumped together—the warrants of the agitator and the commemorative booklets of the Jewish poet. Portraits of Lenin and Maimonides lay side by side... in the margins of Communist leaflets swarmed crooked lines of Ancient Hebrew verse... pages of the Song of Songs and revolver cartridges” (p. 227). This kind of cataloguing is employed also elsewhere in *Red Cavalry*, for instance, in the passage where the little shop of Gedali is described.

There is a very similar catalogue in one of Babel’s early childhood stories, *The Story of my Dovecot*. There is a trunk, here too, full of *bric à brac* left behind by an uncle who died in Los Angeles: “In this trunk there were dumbbells, a lock of female hair, Uncle’s prayer-shawl [*tallit*—Zs. H.], horsewhips with gilt knobs and flower tea in boxes decorated with cheap pearls.”¹¹ In the child’s mind the connections are made by intuition, that is, by association, the most organic feature of the artistic language. Due to the child’s perspective, a highly artistic text is created, extremely rich in images. Images are put together without any explanation—the discrete details merge into a single concise totality in the perception of the reader, amassing meanings by association. Children embrace the world with their eyes, by gazing, marvelling, contemplating, and not by “inadequate” speech or by naming things.

The tool of the catalogue appears in the *Grandmother...* story, too, along with a mysterious or mythic atmosphere. A new pattern turns up here, this time a formal one. The catalogue is a basic poetic feature of the Bible, deeply rooted, first of all, in the paratactic structure of Biblical Hebrew language itself, but it is also an ancient technique or device of poetic imagery. Paratactic structures are usually elliptic, and the coherence is born, as it was mentioned, through association. One of the secrets of Babel’s text is its visual nature, things depicted side by side without any textual element of cause and effect,

10 Another wonderful example of the child’s all-tolerant eye is Émile Ajar (Romain Gary): *La vie devant soi*. In English: *Momo*, 1978.

11 The translator failed to notice the repetition of this detail, the lock of female hair, in the trunk of the rabbi’s son, where he wrote “strand of female hair” (p. 226).

with a hidden logic to be decoded by the reader. This type of “and... and... and” language is characteristic of the ancient (primitive) structure of Hebrew (allowing multiple explications of the Biblical text),¹² of the poetic language (visual impressions, metaphoric imagery, parallels) and of the child’s language, too.¹³ The paratactic linguistic form of Hebrew also implies an uncertain structure of time; not the simple chronological flow of past/present/future, but an open view of time, and—due to the absence of different connective particles and relative pronouns—not a strict, linear sequence of cause and effect, of events past and still ahead. The same applies to child language: time for the child is not strictly structured, and children basically use only ‘and’ as a connective particle between the clauses. The metaphorical/imaginative power of primitive language and primitive thinking lies in open structures—here I use the term “primitive” to denote something elementary, initial, original, of an early stage of development. I am quite convinced that by their use of these elements—parataxis, cataloguing, Biblical allusions, parabolic images and elliptical and metaphorical associations—Jewish authors did not only enrich modern prose, but were placed in the vanguard of 20th century modernity in general.¹⁴

In childish admiration for physical prowess, there lies a deeper juxtaposition, a further pattern, an older one: the traditional life-long devotion of Jew-

12 Let me give a simple but highly illuminating example to explain what I mean by this. Take a Biblical passage in Joshua 1:5 in the Bible: “I will not fail thee or/nor forsake thee.” Most translations in various languages have “and” instead of “or.” Levinas translates “but,” that is: “I will keep you = I do not leave you go but I do not abandon you” (“Je ne t’abandonnerai pas mais je ne te lacherai pas”). “L’impossible divorce est ici le suprême refuge.” Cited in: Benny Lévy: *Etre juif*, 2003, p. 46. The neutral “and”-structure is open to the decoding and allows multiple interpretation. Here, instead of a becalming promise, the ambivalent question of freedom and protection arises, which is very close to the ambivalence of assimilation—becoming free and getting lost, or staying tied down but protected.

13 The psycholinguistic interconnections of visual perception/imagery and that of intellectual forms/models were discovered by the Gestalt theory at the beginning of the 20th century. For a new approach to the question, see: Collins, Ch.: *The Poetics of the Mind’s Eye. Literature and the Psychology of the Imagination*, 1991.

14 Robert Alter points out the same phenomena in the modern Hebrew prose of Mendele and others. Alter, R.: “From Pastiche to Nusakh,” *The Invention of Hebrew Prose. Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism*, 1988. When I first found pairs and triplets in Babel’s prose in 1977, I was relying on the philosophy of language of Sándor Karácsony, and I did not yet discover that Babel followed a pattern deeply rooted in the mentality of the Hebrew language and Biblical poetry. Alter’s “From Pastiche to Nusakh” clarified the continuity that marks out the place of Babel in the process or tradition starting with Biblical Hebrew poetry and lasting into modernity. A brilliant example for this is David Albahari’s post-modern, deconstructionist, but nevertheless “traditional” prose.

ish men, physically weak and fragile, to the study of religious texts, no longer suffices as a model for the assimilated generations. Physically powerful Jews appear in Russian-Jewish literature well before Babel's Odessa "King," Benya Krik. The earliest novel where the issue emerges is Yaroshevsky's *In a Maelstrom*, (1883). Young Vatman, its protagonist, is not admitted into gentile society because they assume he cannot row or shoot. The next "test" of physical prowess in Russian-Jewish literature is horsemanship, preceding *Red Cavalry*, in A. Kipen's *The Horse Trader*, or the horse dealer in Andrei Sobol's *Slow Stream*.¹⁵ The paradoxical, childish admiration for a physically strong enemy, Babel's narrative invention, would become a real paradigm of Jewish literature in the 20th century, when Jews would be confronted with a strong army: in the literature of the Shoah.

The attractive force of the uniform and the cult of masculine beauty in sports were crucial points in the mythicizing of totalitarianism. Georges Perec's novel, *W ou les souvenirs d'enfance* (1975), witnesses how deeply this worship influenced the subconscious of the young generation. A Jewish boy in his first novel (a "novel-in-the-novel") invents a utopian town where sport is the only activity. The boy finds great fun in detailing different sports and achievements. It is only in the last pages of the text that it turns out, much to the surprise of the young boy too, that the well-organized town is in fact a concentration camp.

In *Fascinating Fascism*, an essay on Leni Riefenstahl's photo book (1974), Susan Sontag makes reference to Genet (*Funeral Rites*) and also to Sartre, *La mort dans l'âme* (1949),¹⁶ quoting the description of how Daniel perceives the German army occupying Paris. It appears, just as it does with Babel, as an overtly erotic experience of an adolescent. Sontag points out that the eroticization of their various trappings is a method of manipulation of fascism and totalitarianism, a tool to create admiration (she added, as we indeed must mention, that Soviet totalitarianism used the same method).

¹⁵ The importance of sports in American-Jewish literature, where rowing or playing basketball serve as tests for Jews' aptitude for assimilation would deserve special research. Sport in America was an important shortcut to rapid assimilation, to an immediate escape from the invisible ghetto and acceptance by gentiles; while in Europe it could turn into a dead end. *Sunshine*, a movie by the Oscar-winning Hungarian director István Szabó, adopts the real life story of the Jewish-born Hungarian fencing champion of the Berlin Games of 1936, who after having a splendid career was humiliated in public and executed by the Hungarian fascists. They force him to repeat that he is a "stinking Jew," but he cries out during his execution and until the last minute of his life that he is a Hungarian champion of the Olympic Games.

¹⁶ *New York Review of Books*, 8 February, 1975.

The force and even violence involved in, or concurrent with beauty, the incomprehension and inaccessibility, along with an ambivalent sense of fear are elements that arouse admiration—that is a curious duality found already with Babel.

A real-life concentration camp where children are subject to medical experiments is the scene of *Elysium*, a novel by the Hungarian writer, Imre Keszi. The boy's admiration for the SS doctor is a horrifying one because he fails to recognize his own future murderer in the doctor. Imre Keszi is not to be confused with another Hungarian author with a very similar name, the 2002 Nobel Prize winner, Imre Kertész who, in *Fatelessness*, uses the same pattern to an even more astonishing effect. His 14-year old narrator, when arriving in Buchenwald, is actually fascinated by the typically German neatness, order, discipline, even cosiness of the concentration camp which, as he says, is beautiful and he likes it. He also admires the SS officers in their smart uniforms. Kertész's narrative technique with its resigned, objective and tolerant point of view shocks its readers: his hero tries to understand all. He is a child pretending to be an adult, assuming the attitude of the quiet, disciplined and objective outsider, a behaviour that he was taught in the school of the fraudulent, hypocritical society of Hungary between the two World Wars. Trying hard as he does, he stops pretending when he is being transported together with dead bodies. In this deepest pit in hell, he opens his eyes, and sees a ray of light in the sky that brings him back to life. This light can easily be interpreted as something divine, a sign from heaven, but Kertész passes this phenomenon through the filter of his narrator's mind, bringing up an embarrassing and disturbing simile: "...that was like a sudden intimation of a depth out of which a ray was seemingly being cast on me from above, a rapid, searching gaze, an eye of indeterminate but unquestionable pale hue—somewhat similar to that of the doctor before whom I had once passed, back in Auschwitz."¹⁷ The SS doctor with a heavenly and godlike eye is a paradox created in the distorted mind of the boy—the image has the same effect as Babel's vision of heroic-looking, admirable Cossacks resembling legendary, mythical *bogatyri*.

The child perspective in Shoah literature is a special issue. The employment of a child protagonist or adopting the child's eye view in Shoah literary

17 Kertész, I.: *Fatelessness*, trans. Tim Wilkinson, 2004, p. 186. The scene is a paraphrase of prince Andrei's discovering Christian love on the Borodino battlefield in *War and Peace*. (The novel was translated into Russian by Sh. Markish and myself, *Jerusalem Review/Ierusalimskii Zhurnal* 15–6 [2003] and 18 [2004]. See also the website <http://www.antho.net/jr> for the full text.)

narratives solve several problems because they help to avoid certain pitfalls:¹⁸

1. After the Shoah it became well-nigh impossible to speak, much less write. ("Writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," Adorno's famous adage went.) This is paradox number one, since words are the very building material of literature. It is common experience that on occasions where all those present are expected to remain silent, only children are allowed to speak, because it is only the pure, innocent and impartial, naive word that has any validity.

2. For post-war literature, it was a duty to reveal, tell, record and remember everything that happened in order to create an oral memorial and a *memento* for all times, with the hope that this experience would never repeat itself in human history. The obligation to document was a very heavy responsibility and a burden for literature to bear. The description of facts, when filtered through the child's narrative, does not stretch the literary frames of artistic prose to a breaking point.

3. The same applies to the ideological "message." Didacticism, even if honest, often destroyed (and destroys) aesthetic quality. The child hero or the child's perspective precludes the possibility of ideological intervention by the author.

4. Introducing child heroes or storytellers inevitably implies an emotional exclamation mark calling attention to the fact that the victims included innocent children. There is no analysis, no pros and cons; there are facts set side by side, catalogued in a paratactic and shocking way.

"The Story of My Dovecot"

In the very title Babel underlines the personal character of the first-person narrator in a direct way: it is *my* dovecot that it is all about. What is in the focus is not the exams, nor the pogrom, but the protagonist's dovecot. Once again the most important element is the person of the child, while "History"

¹⁸ Here I would suggest a brief summary from the conclusions of my paper, read in 1998 at the Barcelona Summer University's course, "The Gulag and the Holocaust." See also: "Razum ne raspologает znaniiem.' Destkii vzgliad kak povestvovatel'noi priiom v vengerskoi literature o Katastrofe" ('The Mind does not hold possession of knowledge.' The Child Perspective As a Narrative Method in Hungarian literature on the Shoah.), *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis. Dissertationes Slavicae. XXIV. 2006.*

(taking the form of the pogrom) remains in the background. We will see a similar shift in the other short story dealing with the pogrom, *First Love*, where the pogrom actually provides a “chance” for the boy, bringing him together with his love, Galina. Of course, the dovecot itself becomes a symbol: a home for the bird symbolizing peace and reconciliation, in opposition to the violence of the pogrom. In addition, pigeons, so precious for the boy, when in a juxtaposition, are completely “useless” compared to the things “of use” stolen by the pogrom participants. The boy’s order of values is diametrically opposed to that of others. Here one must think not only of the Biblical symbol of the dove, returning to Noah with an olive branch. Since pogroms were routinely staged to coincide with Christian holidays, e.g. Easter, and started from the procession carrying Church banners with images of Christ’s and saints;¹⁹ here the reader is also meant to recall the Christian-Evangelical meaning of the dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, to become all the more shocked by the contrast between the Christian ideal of love and the horror of the pogrom. A similarly double-edged symbol is the fish (a typical Jewish dish and a symbol of Christ) at the end of the short story—fish are put in the mouth and trousers of the murdered great-uncle.

This paradoxical mix-up of different cultures, the Jewish and Christian meaning of the very same symbol, acts as a kind of powerful spotlight to reveal the real character of the pogrom, a tool which, I think, was first used by Semyon Yushkevich in his *The Lord’s Prayer* (1906?), see p. 161. The striking paradox of the Jewish “Our Lord...” is meant to underline the even more paradoxical, or absurd nature of the “Christian” massacre of the pogrom. (I shall come back to the issue of these dual, Jewish and Christian symbols later on.)

In A. Kipen’s “*Who Art In Heaven...*” (1910) the school entrance exam is the turning point for an assimilated family, whose children have never even heard of their Jewish origin until then. The little boy, in a total confusion of identity, wants to begin praying on Friday evening at the same time as Jewish children, who were, up to then, considered despised and ridiculous by him too. He repeats mechanically the only words he knows as a prayer, taught by the Russian nurse: “Our Father, who art in heaven...” He has no idea what kind of Father/Lord is being addressed; it is all meaningless to him, and pronounced in a distorted way, and he knows nothing about the difference between the existing Fathers/Lords.

19 Cf. the description of the procession in the same *The Story of My Dovecot*, p. 39.

In *The Story of My Dovecot* this paradoxical scene becomes fundamental to Jewish literature as a whole, not only Russian-Jewish literature. The 10-year-old boy has to pass a difficult entrance exam to win the only place reserved for Jews in the Russian school. He is the best, but another boy's tuition fee is covered by his father, a rich Jew, so Babel's protagonist has to wait for another year. A year later he is over-prepared, worried and very nervous: "...trembling, straightening up, in haste, I shouted Pushkin's stanzas with all my might. I shouted them for a long time, no one interrupted my crazy squealing, choking, muttering. Through a crimson blindness, through the violent freedom that had taken possession of me..." (p. 29). He feels "convulsions of exhausted dreams," and he has to be shaken awake from his enthusiastic declamation.

The child in this scene has no understanding of the controversial character of the situation: Peter the Great and Pushkin's poem are the foundation stones, the very essence of Russian national culture. The Jewish boy depicted here represents the pattern of assimilation: from the 1860s on, for decades entire generations of Russian-speaking Jews and the Russian-writing Jewish authors belonging to them were convinced that Russia will be their new homeland. Part of them dreamed of a double cultural affiliation; others wanted to abandon their roots totally. The psychological pattern characteristic of assimilationist Jews—similarly, in this sense, to members of any national minority on the road to assimilation—wanting to become even more patriotic and more devoted in their new-found zeal than the majority people, is also touched upon in this scene, showing the problems of identity and self-definition. Babel's child hero adds several aspects to this, which are suitable for drawing a greater psychological response from readers. He is naive and does not comprehend the situation that the culture he admires and knows so well is not really his own. The choice is not his, but that of the adults (parents) who are, in turn, pressed by circumstances. His personality is only on the way towards identification, and Babel makes us witness it being derailed, his *égarement*. In Russian-Jewish literature, the same pattern is employed by several predecessors of Babel, see p. 135. In 1897,²⁰ after enumerating anti-Semitic actions, Meier/Miron Ryvkin provides a survey of Jewish public schools, where pale, scrawny boys recite patriotic Russian poems by

20 "Iz besed o zhestokikh nraakh", section 'Mimokhodom', *Nedelnaia Khronika Voskhoda* 50 (1897), pp. 1406–7.

Nikitin.²¹ We find the pattern of the Jewish boys declaiming a patriotic poem in American-Jewish literature as well, in prose works written at the same time as Babel's.²²

Michael Gold and Isaac Babel

The father of an American Jewish boy, an immigrant from Russia in New York, spends his time in a wine-cellar. Proud of his son, he makes him stand on top of a table in a crowd of Jews, and tells him to recite loudly the patriotic rhyme: "I love the name of Washington / I love my country, too / I love the flag, the dear old flag / the red, white and blue."²³ This is a scene from Michael Gold's *Jews without Money* (1930), a novel of memoirs showing some astonishing parallels with, if not the direct influence of, Isaac Babel. (Gold actually read Soviet literature and visited Soviet Russia. He was fascinated by the mass-meetings, "organized emotions," and by the "new rituals" of the revolution.)²⁴

Still, no matter how similar the two scenes are at the first glance, they are quite different in their larger vision. Odessa was the most assimilated spot in Russia because it was a port city founded in 1804 when Catherine II invited several nationalities to boost business life there. The nine nationalities formed a melting pot (as Jabotinsky points out in his novel *The Five*), but a melting pot *à la orientale*, not in the same way as in the USA and especially in New York. Jews were accepted here on account of their leading role in trade but always remained a target of anti-Semitism. Gold's Jews are also forced to organize a self-protection team from boys of all ages against "murder-loving Christians" (Gold, p. 37), the Ku-Klux Klan and other (Italian) gangs around. These teams produced the forerunners of Jewish gangsters in New York as

21 "Uzh i est' za shto, / Rus' moguchaia, / poliubit' teb'a, / Nazvat' mater'u.," or "Snova mne slyshits'a pesn'a rodimaia / Snova mne vidits'a rodina-mat' / Ty-l' predno mnoi, nezumno liubimaia / Ty-l' predno mnoi opiat'?" An analogical case can be found in the July 1944 memoirs of Sándor Márai—a Jewish boy, whose grandparents were deported, is reciting a patriotic poem in his refuge. "I am Hungarian, I was born Hungarian, / my nurse sang Hungarian songs to me, / My mother taught me prayers in Hungarian, / and to love you, my beautiful homeland." Márai S.: *Napló, 1943–1944*, 1998 (1st ed. 1945), p. 187.

22 See later the same distorted language in the patriotic song of little David in Henry Roth's: *Call it sleep*.

23 Gold, M.: *Jews without Money*, 1996. Quotes are taken from the first edition: 1930.

24 Gold, M.: *120 million*, 1929.

well as in Odessa. The difference here lies mainly in the existence of state or government-sponsored anti-Semitism in Russia and its absence in the United States. Thus in the scene when the Jewish boy declaims a patriotic poem, Gold's message is put forth not from a Jewish viewpoint, but as social protest by an unemployed, low-class worker. Babel's hidden protest condemns the anti-Semitic legal system of Russia, the institution of the Pale of Settlement, and the *numerus clausus* established for the Jews in education, etc. However, there are some further important parallels between the two authors.

Like the works of Babel, Gold's text is also ornamental (a term which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been applied in American literature). He uses a host of metaphors, alliterations ("peanut politicians, pugilists," Gold, p. 13), enumerations ("Excitement, dirt, fighting, chaos," Gold, p. 14); alliterations ("Carnival and catastrophe," Gold, p. 14), anaphors, puns, and poetic intensification ("Even in sleep, I could hear it, I can hear it now," Gold, p. 14). Pathos is expressed by rhetorical triplets, too, and, just like with Babel, it is immediately combined with the negation of pathos: the high and low, the beautiful and the hideous or vulgar, are combined in a single, ambivalent binary contrast. ("Earth's trees, grass, flowers could not grow on my street, but the rose of syphilis bloomed by night and day," Gold, p. 17.) Cf. Babel's *A Sequel to the Story of a Horse*, the combination of the pathos of the revolution with a grotesque and cynical remark about a heaven whose "old man [...] doesn't have a kingdom, but a bordello with all the trimmings" when "there is enough gonorrhoea on the earth already" (p. 199).

Short sentences are the predominant form of description for both Gold and Babel when they intend to provide a total visual impression of a scene or place. "A sweatshop holiday. Egypt's slaves around a campfire in the shadow of the pyramids. They drank wine even then. Thousands of years ago. And talked as now. The Bible records it. And their hearts were eased by it. And Moscowitz played the Babylonian harp" (Gold, p. 116). It will suffice to put this next to such sentences by Babel as "In the corner broad-shouldered Jews who resembled fishermen or apostles suffered aloud over their prayer books" (*The Rebbe*, p. 125) or the whole of *The Cemetery in Kozin*: "Assyria and the mysterious decay of the East in the tall-weeded fields of Volhynia. Grey stones, ground smooth, with three-hundred-year-old characters on them," etc. (p. 150). Both Gold and Babel make historical leaps in their parallels, combining different historical eras of Jews. Gold unites Egyptian captivity and the Babylonian exile in a more explicit (more hypotactic) way ("even then... as now"); Babel refers to Babylon-Assyria in a more metaphorical, more con-

densed paratactic structure. At the end of Babel's text, another rhetorical element, typical of both writers, can be discovered: a strange intervention by the narrator's voice, an exclamation with a triply repeated sequence of "O...." "O death, O profit-seeker, O avaricious thief, why hast thou not just once taken pity of us?" (p. 150). Gold also applies this threefold exclamation several times, and, quite similarly to Babel, finishes his novel in this way: "O workers' Revolution... you are the true Messiah [...] O Revolution that forced me to think, to struggle and to live."²⁵ O great Beginning!..." (Gold, p. 309). The ideological pathos is less and less foreign to Babel in his late works. The final sentences of *Karl-Jankel* (1931) or those of *The Journey* (1932) speak for themselves. (Babel wrote these short stories nearly at the same time as Gold wrote his.) It would be beyond the scope of this paper to analyze how deeply Babel elaborates in *Red Cavalry* the metaphor of the Messianic revolution so common at the turn of the 19th/20th century.²⁶

To continue with the less formal but more thematic similarities between the two writers, some basic elements of their similar *Weltanschauung*, especially their attraction and admiration for marginal men and women, the gangsters and the prostitutes, must also be mentioned. Nigger and One Eye may be psychologically and sociologically more exact versions of the Jewish gangsters than Benya Krik, who is more *bogatyr*-like, legendary and anecdotal—perhaps for the simple reason that Gold grew up among these people while Babel was, in reality, an outsider—even in Odessa or everywhere, as Shklovsky already noticed. (By the way, Nigger has a dovecot on the roof, see *The Story of My Dovecot* above.) It is worth noting that Gold's panorama of the Jewish lower social strata is very reminiscent of Semyon Yushkevich, especially his Odessa novel, *Street* ("Ulitsa" [n.d., 1910s])—and Yushkevich was quite well known in the United States in the 1920s (the Yushkevich–Gold parallel might deserve further comparative research).

As for the way the two authors see women, Babel writes a lot about prostitutes and women extending comfort through sex from the very beginning (*Doudou*, *Ilya Isaakovics* and *Margarita Prokofyevna*, etc.). He discovers new qualities in the lonely, self-denying female characters much more common

25 Another 3-fold structure inside.

26 This was the central topic of a previous research project of mine. Hetényi, Zs.: *Csillagosok—keresztesek. Mítosz és messianizmus Babel Lovashadseregében*, 1992. Some chapters appeared in Russian in: *Studia Slavica Hung.* 27 (1981), 31 (1985), 34 (1988), 36 (1989), 37 (1991–2), 38 (1993), 43 (1998).

in French (Maupassant) than in Russian or Jewish literature. Babel's whores are likened to Madonna (in *The Widow*, Sashka holds the dead body of her lover, the general killed in battle, on her knees, and calls him "My Jesus Christ") or are shown simultaneously as lovers, sisters (in both senses: as nurses and members of the family)²⁷ as well as mothers. They are ambivalent Carnival characters (in the Bakhtinian sense of the Carnival), high and low, virgin and whore, saintly and vulgar at the same time. Similarly to carnival figures, the feminine "qualities and quantities" that Babel's women are endowed with are extreme or exaggerated: Sashka, the "lady of all the squadron," has an "immoderate body" (*The Widow*, p. 203): "her monstrous breasts swung behind her back" (*Czesniki*, p. 216), "Sashka approached, her breasts dangling" (*After the Battle*, p. 221). Gold's prostitutes have the same autonomy and anatomy: dignity and an abundantly feminine appearance. "She was eating an apple. She munched it slowly with the dignity of a whole Chamber of Commerce at its annual banquet. Her lap spread before her like a table" (Gold, p. 17).

In Gold's city scenes, the war and pogrom situations of Babel, occur—*mutatis mutandis*—with an astonishing frequency: an impersonal description of a street scandal (chapter "Summer toadstools," Part 8) is reminiscent of the way Babel takes note of the pogrom: a virgin is raped by a gang much the same way as by Makhno's soldiers in the Civil War (*At our brother Makhno's* [1924]).

Gold is akin to Babel not only where his sensual-erotic attitude to women is concerned but also in his seeking femininity in the reality of the world (what I called the "eroticisation of reality" in a different context). Despite the English language having no explicit feminine noun in its grammar and Gold's consequent inability to play word games with nouns as poetically as Babel does, for example in the description of a church garden (*Pan Apolek*), he nevertheless manages to get across the feminine connotations of images. "Darkness, the old mother, has not forgotten my east Side. We are at peace in her womb" (Gold, p. 123). Compare Babel's metaphor: "The night consoled us in our sorrows, a light wind fanned us like a mother's skirt" (*Evening*, p. 169) or "[t]he evening placed its motherly palms on my burning

27 Hetényi, Zs.: "Eskadronnaia dama, vozvedennaia v Madonnu. Ambivalentnost' v Konarmii I. Babel'a," *Studia Slavica Hung.* 31 (1985), pp. 161–9; and Hetényi, Zs.: "'Up' and 'down', Madonna and Prostitute: the Role of Ambivalence in 'Red Cavalry' by Isaac Babel," *Acta Literaria Acad. Sci.* XXXII/3–4 (1990), pp. 309–26. (An unfortunately poor translation by the journal at the time.)

forehead" (*My First Goose*, p. 123). The cosmic expansion of focus so characteristic of Babel's poetic language (sun, moon, stars participating in the events and basic elements of the metaphors) turns up also in Gold's text: "The pimps sleep. The cops sleep. The old Talmud dreamers sleep. The Rocky Mountains, the Atlantic Ocean, my Christie Street and Bronx Park are in the darkness" (Gold, p. 123). Gold even created a Gedali of his own in his novel in the character of the old Hassidic Jew Reb Shmuel: "His large blue eyes were calm with spiritual certainties" (Gold, p. 191).

Finally, in Gold's approach to Jews and Jewishness one finds a similar ambiguousness and duality characteristic of the hesitant identity of assimilated Jews, which made Babel a top-ranking figure of world literature. In his "childhood" novels Babel depicts his Hassidic forefathers as funny people. His narrator does not keep a great distance, but his tone implies some irony well compensated by the heroic hyperbole of fairy tales. Later, in *Red Cavalry* the opposite extreme of his mental attitude also appears: a sense of self-hatred becomes tangible in the short story *Berestechko* (pp. 161-2) where the Hassidic *shtetl* appears as a smelly, gloomy, rotting and airless ghetto. Similarly to Babel, Gold is critical of his family's observance of religion and the synagogue in general: "meaningless Hebrew for hours, bad air," "people gossiped, yawned, belched, took snuff, talked business and spat on the floor. Bored" (Gold, pp. 182). Babel belonged to the same generation of assimilated Jews: according to his *Diary, 1920*, he could not find the appropriate place in the prayer book in the synagogue.²⁸ At the same time, for Gold, all his European roots and Jewish tradition in general are very precious. He wants to escape from the ghetto atmosphere and, as a true Socialist, rejects religion, but—here is a pattern again, but this time a well known psychological and sociological one—he seeks a new Messiah in Communist devotion.

Henry Roth and Isaac Babel

Call it sleep is a most important landmark in child-focused type narration in X-Jewish literature (X here is a symbol of the language, whichever it may be, of the surrounding nation). The novel is found under this heading in all critical surveys; it is underlined "how the conflict between ordinary language and the

28 "I can't find my place in the prayerbook." Better to write: "The" place in prayer book. Isaac Babel, *1920 Diary*, ed. C. Avins, trans. H. T. Willets, 1995, p. 4.

language of imagination" is shown by Byalik, Shakhsh and Roth.²⁹ The general problem of how "language would be inadequate to express visions" is a well known and most evident issue where child storytellers are concerned in literary texts, like in *Lovers' Childhood* by Pasternak, *Kotik Letaev* by A. Bely, just to name a few Russian authors. The question to be investigated now should be "what is the specific feature of child narrators in Jewish literature?" The difference is that the questions raised by child narration—"utter the unutterable," "who am I"—are, in reality, philosophical and psychological identity problems (e.g. for Bely, Pasternak, as it was mentioned, and many others in world literature). For Jewish authors the self-identification of the child hero—with his impartiality and his naive incomprehension on the one hand, and his imaginative-intuitive, paratactic contemplation of the world on the other—stands for the choice of cultural identity, the future of their people. What follows is an attempt to place Henry Roth in the specific context of Jewish literature with a child perspective.

It is easy to find a parallel to the patriotic song scene analyzed above in Roth's novel, too. David tries to overcome his fear by singing a pathetic song: "My country 'tis of Dee, / Sweet land of liberty / Of Dee I sing / Land where our foddors died!"³⁰ Of course, even if the United States is David's country indeed, and even if compared to Russia, it is a land of liberty, still, since "his fathers" did not die there, he has no roots there. There is an obvious, paradoxical contradiction between the words and the life of a Jewish boy. Roth deepens the paradox here by his special way of narration. He records the poor pronunciation of the boy whose mother-tongue (*mameloshn*), is Yiddish. Even if we were to disregard the circumstance that children often have only a vague understanding of the lyrics of songs, which mean little to them, and they are therefore inclined to distort or mispronounce these words,³¹ the "misspelt" text in this case underlines the distance or even gulf between the song, its language and its singer (the boy). This distorted language is turned into a new method by Roth: he develops a special English to differentiate it from the "natural" Yiddish, which is represented here by correct English. The "dis-

29 Sokoloff, N.: "Discoveries of Reading: Stories of Childhood by Bialik, Shakhsh, and Roth," *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985), pp. 321-42.

30 Roth, H.: *Call It Sleep*, 1991, p. 62.

31 See above Yushkevich's short story with the distorted prayer "Our Lord." The similarly distorted words of a marching song were turned into the title of a Hungarian-Jewish novel showing Hungarian history from the point of view of a Jewish boy. The song in the novel is the "March of Young Pioneers." Vámos, M.: *Zenga zének*, 1983.

torted" English is not only "phonetic" (spelt the way it is pronounced), but in all its structures (grammatical, syntactical) an oral version of child language, or later, for instance, at the end of the novel, the idiom of the man in the street. Roth's specific multilingualism has been widely discussed in critical literature ever since 1934.³² The problem as to how Henry Roth creates several languages in English has been discussed at length by many. To the best of my knowledge, though, this kind of stylization has never been linked to Babel's method as yet. Babel, in a very similar manner, invented a "Russian-Yiddish" for his Odessa Jews in his *Odessa Tales*, and a special, phonetically distorted Russian to create a sense of separateness from the Cossacks in *Red Cavalry*. Babel was a master, if not *the* master of the *skaz* technique, a basic element of the new prose in the 1920s.³³ *Skaz* is by definition a stylization of the idiom of the lower strata of society, the function of which is to create a narrative structure distanced several times over. This distance separates the narrator both from the author and the characters (Babel from Lyutov, Lyutov from the Cossacks, and the Cossacks from the Jews), and the language defines the narrator's place among the strata of the society.

Let us stick to the text of the song for one more moment at Henry Roth. There is a hidden allusion here to the most important metaphor dominating the novel—that of the father's character. The allusion in the song to the father's death mirrors the boy's genuinely Freudian desire. His father is the cause of all his troubles, and his fear growing to extreme anxiety comes across in the novel as something associated with the supernatural paternal threat. Of course, apart from the authentic psychological situation of the family, there is also a manifest "Lord and His people" metaphor encoded in this father-and-son relationship. Judaism is a paternalistic religion; that is the reason why father-and-son relationships are so predominant in the literature of Jewish assimilation. In *Call It Sleep*, this controversial relationship starts with hostile rejection by the father ("not my son"), continues with the son being punished, and nearly comes to a tragic end. The son cannot get close to his father, looks for other relationships, losing his inner balance in his fear, and nearly dies.

32 Cf. *New Essays on Call it Sleep*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher, 1996, afterword by H. Wirth-Nesher, in: *Call It Sleep*, 1991. See also: Miron, D.: "A Language as Caliban," *A Traveller Disguised*, ed. D. Miron, 1973. On the general problem: Even-Zohar, I.: "Russified Literary Models," *Materials of the Symposium "The Dynamics of East European Ethnicity outside of Eastern Europe"*, 1977; Samuel, M.: *In Praise of Yiddish*, 1971, just to mention a few.

33 The *skaz*-method took its origin from Leskov, was renewed by Zamyatin, and was widely used by writers during the 1920s, mainly by Pilnyak and Zoshchenko.

After the cathartic end, the father accepts his son, but for the son everything remains open and continues to be problematic according to the last sentence of the novel: "One might as well call it sleep."

Babel's father characters are not at all so awe-inspiring or cruel but usually loving and ready for sacrifice; they mean the world to their sons. The plural is justified since Babel's father characters are not always the same: in *Awakening* the son must leave his home because of his hysterical father. "Bobka held me tightly by the hand, so that I should not run away. She was right. I was thinking of escape" (p. 67). This "escape" was Babel's last word in the cycle, finishing what are known as his "childhood" stories, in 1931.³⁴

But it was anything but the last word on fathers in Jewish literature. Before moving forward, to times following Babel we have to remember a predecessor here, Grigory Bogrov, in his *Notes of a Jew* (1871–1873), where he creates a father in the context of self-hatred.³⁵ The narrator's escape is psychologically justified by his rejection of his father who cannot but look at his children as if they were insects, and denies them the comfort of the family. Roth continues this tendency and his character belongs to the same line of Jewish father figures: powerful, demanding, merciless and rejecting the Lord. Another merciless father of the same kind is portrayed by the Hungarian Jewish author Károly Pap.³⁶ Azarel's father is a rabbi (as such, he represents the concept of Judaism, or the Almighty Himself, even more emphatically) and the reaction

34 Babel's other typical male characters, uncles, grandfathers and some fathers are anecdotal figures. The chief tool of the anecdote is exaggeration (see later); Babel's ironical portrayal depicts hysterical madmen, clowns or comical or grotesque wandering Jews. Irony is Babel's method of *ostranenie* ("making peculiar"). This line of crazy fathers is shown, however, with loving irony and has a long continuation in the Jewish literature of Eastern Europe: Danilo Kiš—the timetable maniac father in *Garden, ashes; My father's Evangile* and other father-stories by David Albahari, and, of course, Bruno Schulz with his stories of *Cinnamon Shops* and *The Sand-Glass Sanatorium*.

35 Bogrov was a pioneer of the child narrative not only in Russian-Jewish literature but also Jewish literature as a whole. In a book I found long after finishing my work, thanks to a conference on Babel at Stanford University in 2004, M. Z. Feierberg is named as the first to write about the process of assimilation and the struggle for freedom in a child's mind (p. 14). The wonderful book by Naomi B. Sokoloff: *Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction* (1992) is an outstanding literary analysis of the topic. I am happy to continue and add to that study on eight writers (Sholom Aleichem, Bialik, Henry Roth, Jerzy Kosinski, Ahron Appelfeld, David Grossman, A. B. Yehoshua and C. Ozick) with my investigations on Russian-Jewish and some European authors, written earlier in Hungarian and translated here to English.

36 Pap, K.: *Azarel*. Transl. by Paul Olchváry, 2001. The Russian Translation was made by Sh. Markish, with my help, see *Jerusalem Review*, November 2001; December 2002.

to self-hatred is also the same: escape. The conclusion of the novel is strikingly similar to that of Henry Roth's: the rebel returns, and his memory has the capacity to dissolve everything that happened in a kind of fairy tale produced by a dream or an illness. Needless to say that dream is the realm of paratactic quasi-visual perception, where connections deeper than logic, timeless and spaceless, are established by intuition, and that is why oneiric metaphors in literature are fundamental clues. In a dream nothing is impossible or explainable, and everything can be interpreted freely. Dream decoding is reminiscent of mythology in so far as it also reveals what cannot be rationally understood, and analyzes the incomprehensible.

The problem as to how Babel and Roth both create mythological worlds from the child's point of view, out of elements that are not understood by them, is a complex issue, which cannot be discussed in detail in the present paper. Suffice it to say here that in this mythology, associative connections are made between images and phenomena perceived visually and not logically. In David's mind, for instance, marriage and funeral become connected by the same coach which is being used on both occasions—this completely Carnavalesque (Bakhtin's term) understanding of the interconnection between life and death is uncannily reminiscent of Babel's. David's friendship with Leo, a Polish-Irish Christian boy brings elements of Christianity into his world. He falls in love with Leo. This kind of love/friendship between young children is a pattern present already in Bogrov's work, but in his novel there is a fascinating and very genuine relationship developed into an odd triangle, with the Jewish boy being attracted to brother and sister alike, as enamoured, in a sense, of Misha as of Olga. This androgynous or platonic love encompasses everything that represents health, a natural life and freedom compared to the Jewish way of life. The contrast of the street as freedom with the home as suffocating prison or that between "free" children in the street as opposed to the closed, ghetto-like life in the family and the *cheder*, is another pattern which turns symbolic in the text of nearly every Jewish writer of assimilation (like Bogrov's novel, Babel's *Awakening*, Kipen's *Izhe esi na nebesi...*, Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, Károly Pap's *Azarel*, etc.).³⁷ In David's microcosm the incomprehensible culture of Christianity along with separate islands of knowledge of Judaism produces a naive mixture of superstitions, esoteric reasoning and tra-

37 An interesting coincidence is that both Leo in *Call It Sleep*, and Mitia in Kipen's *Izhe esi na nebesi* attract Jewish friends by making kites. Kite-making may be conceived as a double symbol of liberty: that of the practical ability of those "clever with their hands," wasting no time with reading or learning, and that of the liberty of flying free.

ditions. The emerging instinctive and original mythology derived from similar or overlapping elements of Judaism and Christianity offers a universal meaning valid in all cultures, and gives rise to such categories of assimilation as tolerance, betrayal, religion, mythology and ritual. In a broader context, both Babel and Roth, with their dually rooted mythology based both on Judaism and Christianity, are linked to the concept of messianic redemption. Babel places it in the political context of Communist revolution (the rabbi's son on the one hand, and his apostolic Cossacks, on the other). Roth's solution is personal salvation: David's Christ-like self-sacrifice on electric cables is committed in the guise of Prophet Isaiah, where he is at the same time the acting hero and the victim of the crucifixion, the little *hadgadaya* from the Seder song offered to the Almighty (with an evident reference to the story of Isaac going up on the hill to be killed and offered by his father).

Babel also shows how a child's fantasy may also be his escape route and his shelter from reality. The storyteller imagines himself in the Jewish self-defence army with a rifle, but not to defend his humiliated father but to fascinate Galina, to draw the girl's attention to himself. We saw that the same motif of compensation, the "dream of the weak about being strong," the Jew with a gun is also in the centre of the action in Semyon Hekht's *The Man Who Forgot His Life*. His 14-year-old protagonist falls in love with a Russian girl, the daughter of a cruel anti-Semitic policeman. This Romeo and Juliet story³⁸ is set during the Civil War, and the boy, just to prove his bravery to the girl who admires the handsome Cossacks in their smart, colourful uniforms, enters the headquarters of the Ukrainian nationalist army of Simion Petlyura, the most anti-Semitic bunch to fight in the Russian Civil War, where he is executed. Babel, on the other hand, does not allow his little protagonist to realize his dream, thus depriving him of a heroic destiny—and the readers of a negative catharsis. In fact, from the point of the view of reader-response, the approach chosen by Babel is psychologically more provocative as well as frustrating: he renders an authentic case history of how nervous illness develops in young Jews.

Mental/nervous disorder or the concurrence of traumatic psychological change with physical (psycho-somatic) illness is also a typical problem of assimilation. At the end of the novel *Azarel* by Károly Pap, little Azarel, falling ill, concludes the same lesson as the one learned by Roth's lonely David for a lifetime: "Trust nothing. Never believe. Don't play" (Roth, p. 130). Babel's narrator tells: "The doctor found I had a nervous illness. 'This illness,' he said,

38 A love affair with a gentile girl is another typical motif of Jewish literature. Bogrov was the first who used it in his *Notes of a Jew*.

‘occurs only in Jews and among Jews it occurs only in women.’ [...] And now, when I remember those sad years I find in them the beginning of the ailments that torment me, and the causes of my premature and dreadful decline” (p. 49). Instead of a gun-toting, macho protector, what the reader sees here is a boy with a nervous disorder that is characteristic mainly of women... The last sentence is a poetic overstatement; a rhetorical tool to keep the sympathy of the reader alive.

Overstatement, exaggeration—fantasy—creativity (“First Love” and “In the Basement”)

Poetic overstatement and hyperbole is one of the main elements of the fantasy-based lying of Babel’s child heroes, one that remains one of the most characteristic patterns of Babel’s style. “I was a deceitful boy. This was the result of reading. My imagination was always inflamed” (p. 49). Fantasy and lying stand for creative writing, as apparent from the short story *In the Basement*. The ability to make up lies comes in handy also after childhood—the short story *My first Royalty* (a love broken up by reading books and teaching writing skills to a young woman) is a direct continuation of the story *In the Basement*. Overstatement, as Bruno Bettelheim explains in his book on fairy tales, manifests the basic requirement of children to understand the world. Children cannot accept the mixture of positive and negative values in reality; ambivalence is very unsettling for them. They must imagine everything in polarities in binary antagonisms to make them clear; this is their way of creating order in chaos.³⁹ And even these binary antagonistic features have to appear in exaggerated forms so that children can be absolutely certain of them.⁴⁰

Similarly to fairy tales, fantasy is also a healing experience for the psyche, not simply because it offers a refuge or escape from reality, but because it provides an opportunity to ponder different problems of the self.⁴¹ Or, expressed in terms of literary psychology, literature is a confrontation with real-

39 Bettelheim, B.: *The Uses of Enchantment—The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, 1976, p. 102.

40 Ibid., p. 95.

41 Bettelheim proves his statement with the mechanism of the stories of *The Arabian Nights*. He argues that only unrealistic stories can give solutions and satisfaction to children in their real problems—realistic ones suggest simplified answers.

ity where one faces reality in the form of models and in a metaphorical way. When the young boy in Babel's *In the Basement* recites Shakespeare—the funeral speech of Anthony over Brutus—one must ask the question why he loves those lines “more than anything else in life” (p. 55). Does he want to find shelter in a time and space far from his own, in ancient Rome? Certainly this is the simplest explanation. But Babel's *ars poetica* as expressed here is that literature makes us understand the fundamental fact that nothing is certain or unambiguous in this world, everything depends on the way we speak about it. Language, rhetoric, narration is everything, because what it carries is our relationship to reality. This is the main message of the speech of Anthony for the boy who aspires to be a writer. This decoding is confirmed by a sudden ironical parallel to Anthony's words in the final scene. The boy, ashamed of the family scandal taking place in the presence of his friend, wants to vanish from this world, and submerges in a barrel of cold water. His grandfather stands over him, saying: “I go to take castor oil that I should have something to put *on your grave...*” (p. 59). It is not easy to see the connection that the boy is a successor of this sarcastic grandfather in his literary aspirations: the old Levy Itzhok spent all seventy years of his life describing his neighbours. The manuscript *A Man with No Head* is a mimetic diary of his life, rich in highly colourful personalities, thus he wrote a chronicle. His grandson, however, does the opposite of that; he commits his fantasies to paper. The basic discrepancy between life and literature, (documentary chronicle versus fiction) is the relevant contradiction here.⁴²

In *First Love*, Babel found a further pattern of child behaviour which became a method later on in his oeuvre; this is the secret observation of persons, “peeping” from a hidden place. “Peeping” and eavesdropping are peculiar forms of the child's eye view (or hearing), a typical situation of watching, collecting life experience. The boy watches the object of his love, in all forms of erotic closeness with her husband. This perspective is a characteristic situation for his short stories *V shcholochku*, *Di Grasso*, *Dante Street*, *My First Royalty* as well as *Evening* and *The Song in Red Cavalry* where characters listen to the noises of lovemaking.⁴³

42 As Bettelheim notices, the usual logic and cause-and-effect relations do not apply to fairy tale, because the realm of the subconscious is exceptional and surprising. Nevertheless, the irrational is not only alarming but also evoking hope (nothing is hopeless as long as there are exceptions and miracles [Bettelheim, pp. 86, 87]). Fantasy plays the same role as fantastic elements in literature.

43 The title *First Love* holds a reference to Turgenev's well-known short story, *With Grandmother*, mentioned in Babel's *Childhood*, as one of the boy's captivating, exciting readings.

Bettelheim points at another general psychological problem which appears crucial in the Jewish literature of assimilation. The fundamental suggestion of fantasy stories and fairy tales, he explains, is that everyone who stays true to his principles and himself comes to a happy end, and everyone who usurps someone else's place will come to a bad end. This means that only those are autonomous personalities who have their own order of values and act correspondingly.⁴⁴ That is why the issue of identity is so problematic in the case of Jewish children in assimilated families or at the early stages of assimilation: the system of values is undefined; not even opposite values are formulated clearly enough to be chosen from, and there is no bipolarity of values ("either one or the other"). The old, traditional identity (of the observant Jew) becomes hidden, rejected, lost by the first generation, while the new identity is hard to establish. It is the job of the second generation to find it, the generation represented in literature by the child who cannot become a self-confident grown-up and remains childish for ever.

Dual identity and extreme sensitivity may damage the personality, as is strongly evidenced by the short story *In the Basement*.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this negative psychological trait is very differently evaluated in literary characters, especially in the 20th century. These features may carry a positive value in literature: sensitivity may go hand in hand with mental and psychical wealth, an artistic perception of the world in its totality, and a person's dual identity may be a source of tolerance, open mind, multiculturalism, flexibility and versatile vividness.

It is important to emphasize that self-hatred is always a sign of the author's doubts. Self-hatred is an issue that certainly comes through only in the child narrative. The overwhelming burden of Jewish life, the suffocating atmosphere of the ghetto, and the excitingly different qualities of gentiles can only be depicted authentically and without didacticism from the impartial perspective of the child.⁴⁶ Antagonistically opposing and irreconcilable cultures can coexist peacefully only in the mind of the child who is still unfettered by the necessity of making his choices.

There he is caught in the act of "inspecting in the shop of Madame Rosalie, the pale pink corsets with their long, wavy suspenders" (p. 22) as a student, in the same way Turgenev's young narrator is caught in the act of secretly gazing from the woods at his young lady neighbour, his—and his father's—future love.

44 Bettelheim, p. 194.

45 The first author of self-hatred was, again, Grigory Bogrov, cf. Markish, Sh.: "Tretii otets-osnovatel'," *Ierusalimskii Zhurnal* 6 (2000), pp. 228–9.

46 The difference is traceable in Bogrov's novel: in the chapters on childhood his self-hatred is "authentic," while in the chapters on the hero's married life it is didactic.

In Babel's case, the coexistence of ambivalent values in the author's approach, his carefully kept distance from both of the antagonistic opposites (stay or escape, reject or love, home or prison, Jews or gentiles, be faithful or critical, etc.) also results in a grotesque view of the Jewish milieu. In general, the grotesque is not an organic element of the child perspective, but in Babel's case the opposing poles are articulated with childish exaggeration (see above), with pathos as the basic attitude. Anthony's speech in the "upper" registers versus the basement's "low" atmosphere, the rich Jewish family versus the poor one, the members of the family at once as heroic and foolish figures, are all mixtures of the tragic and the comic.

The polarity of the stylistic layers also reaches extreme contrasts, but the grotesque stays hidden in their semantic parallel. Anthony's *funeral* speech is delivered in a pathetic manner: "Before my eyes—in the mist of the *universe*—hung the face of Brutus... The Roman people, growling, advanced towards me" (p. 55). At that moment the drunken uncle appears with second-hand furniture, and starts to yell curses in Yiddish. His "brazen voice caulked up all the holes of the *universe*... he promised that our eyes would fall out, that our children would begin to rot and decompose while yet in their mother's womb, that we would not be able to bury each other and that we would be dragged by the hair to a *common grave*..." (p. 57, the italics are mine—Zs. H.). Not only the cosmic dimensions of the universe, but also the funeral context and the pathetic heat combine the high and the low to a comical effect, with Rome and Shakespeare on the one side, and second-hand furniture and the drunken uncle on the other; literature and life contrasted, set side by side.

Summary

The child simply records and absorbs phenomena around him without establishing logical connections between them. His unbiased, objective vision allows the author to show a non-mimetic world, reconstructing and rearranging the elements of the real world. One of the characteristics of this model is that important things are relegated to the background, while insignificant details come to the fore, magnified. This shift or change (mirroring, from a psychological aspect, the intuitive approach of the child) results in a seemingly distorted image of reality, revealing thereby connections deeper than those logically existing between the elements of this reality.

In the child's mind, objects and phenomena are transformed into images rather than concepts or ideas. The child contemplates phenomena, but does

not understand them in the same way as grown-ups; that is why he finds unusual connections and relationships between them. This intuitive, or, from a certain aspect, deeper understanding provides a new interpretation.

The reason a child does not make logical connections between phenomena is not only that he or she lacks the necessary background knowledge or practical information, but also because his character is still unstable. His self-identification is not yet fully established, hence his impartiality; he does not have the adult's preferences and distinctions, and his hierarchy of values is not yet developed either. This unstable self-identification is an absolutely crucial feature of child heroes in the Jewish literature of assimilation, because the choices open to them, and leading towards a new self-determination or identity, stand metaphorically for those of the people at a crossroads, the child's duality reflects the people's ambiguous self-evaluation.

In the child's mind the connections are made by intuition, that is, by association, the most organic feature of artistic language. Due to the child's perspective, a highly artistic text is created, extremely rich in images. Images are put together without any explanation—the discrete details merge into a single concise totality in the perception of the reader, amassing meanings by association. Children embrace the world with their eyes, by gazing, marvelling, contemplating, and not by “inadequate” speech or by naming things.

Duality and doubtfulness are meant to mirror the relevant attitude of the hesitant intelligentsia, “childish” in its inability to establish its true preferences. This apparent hesitation and childishness, however, are also seen as positive features: those of human tolerance as opposed to a thoughtless, indeterminate system of values. Dual identity and extreme sensitivity may damage the personality. Nevertheless, this negative psychological trait is very differently evaluated in literary characters, especially in the 20th century. These features may carry a positive value in literature: sensitivity may go hand in hand with mental and psychical wealth, an artistic perception of the world in its totality, and a person's dual identity may be a source of tolerance, open mind, multiculturalism, flexibility and versatile vividness.

Parataxis is the primitive, rudimentary way of thinking of the child. Paratactic structures are usually elliptic, and the coherence is born, as it was mentioned, through association. One of the secrets of Babel's text is its visual nature, things depicted side by side without any textual element of cause and effect, with a hidden logic to be decoded by the reader. The paratactic linguistic form of Hebrew also implies an uncertain structure of time; not the simple chronological flow of past/present/future, but an open view of time, and—due to the absence of different connective particles and relative pronouns—not a

strict, linear sequence of cause and effect, of events past and still ahead. The same applies to child language: time for the child is not strictly structured, and children basically use only “and” as a connective particle between the clauses. The metaphorical/imaginative power of primitive language and primitive thinking lies in the open structures—here I use the term “primitive” to denote something elementary, initial, original, of an early stage in development. I am quite convinced that by their use of these elements—parataxis, cataloguing, Biblical allusions, parabolic images and elliptical and metaphorical associations—Jewish authors not only enriched modern prose, but were placed in the vanguard of 20th century modernity in general.

*

As a conclusion to the last chapter of my book, I propose a chart composed of keywords arranged according to a system of interconnections: an attempt to sum up the patterns, techniques and methods in the way I see them in the literature of Jewish assimilation.

Table 1.
Patterns in the texts

Methods, techniques		General features
Textual		
1. narrowing the focus	→	non-mimetic world
2. exaggeration, overstatement	→	carnavalesque, grotesque
3. special language	→	narrative distance
4. paradoxes (non-logical connections)	→	impartial eye, duality
5. catalogue (images)	→	“high” visualisation
6. parataxis	→	irreconcilable contradictions
7. parataxis, structures open to decoding	→	impartial eye, ambivalence, tolerance
8. childish polarization	→	ambivalence
Psychological		
9. confusing the important and the irrelevant	→	indirect descriptions, deeper/hidden connections
10. unstable scale of values	→	the Jewish people on the crossroads
11. unsettled self-identification	→	non-autonomous personality
12. contemplative behaviour	→	indirect description
13. associative thinking, intuition	→	metaphorical text

Table 2.

Thematic patterns (numbers in brackets refer patterns to the list above)

staying in the frames of a microcosm	1
contrasting former weak and new strong generations of Jews (horses in Russia, sports in America)	11
childish admiration for the strong enemy	4, 11
duality of feelings: flee or remain, love and withdrawal	4, 8, 11
feeling of love for a Christian/gentile girl	4, 11
choosing a Christian/gentile friend	4, 11
building personal myth concocted from Judaic, Christian and mythical elements	3, 4, 10 13
childish sensitivity: day-dreaming, lying, fantasy, creativity	5, 6, 13
mental or physical illness	2, 4, 8, 10
childish egocentrism, ignoring the history behind "ME"	1, 9
unconscious patriotism (songs, poems)	4, 10, 11
growing distant from "ours" by fear, e.g. of strong, "Godlike" fathers; self-hatred of Jews	4, 10, 11
growing distant from "ours" by shame, e.g. of clownish/foolish fathers; keeping distance from "ours" through <i>ostraneniie</i>	2, 8

Table 3.

Child hero as narrator in the literature of the Shoah (additional characteristics)

Natural naivet   makes it possible to spell out the unutterable.

Childish thinking in images does not allow non-fiction documentary to infiltrate.

Direct impartiality of the child's eye in order to avoid ideological didacticism.

Child hero is an innocent victim, without realizing his situation.

BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

David Yakovlevich AIZMAN (1860–1922)

Born in Nikolaev near Odessa. He earned his living as a private tutor from the age of 15 on. He started to work for *Odessa Papers* when he was 20, writing sketches on country life. He studied painting at the art school of Odessa, then at the École de Beaux Arts in Paris, but soon gave up painting, finding it less expressive than literature, a pastime for the idle rich. He tested himself first as a writer while living in a hidden French village where he wrote his first story (*A Little to the Side*, 1901). Anything but prolific as a writer, Aizman was a perfectionist, chiselling his works for a long time, sometimes pouring too much thought into his pieces which are at times tendentious. He joined Gorky's *Znaniie* circle between 1905 and 1907. In the volumes *Black Days* (1904) and *Burning Bush* (1907), the latter published in Berlin, he wrote about poor Jews and Jewish intellectuals attracted to the revolution and their controversial relationship to Russians. He gives a panoramic view of the horrors of the pogrom in *Flood of Blood* (1906, published in 1908). His later stories were influenced by Russian symbolism; their action, however, remains traditionally eventful and strong, and this influence is present rather in his use of motifs than in his poetic idiom (*The Heart of Being*, 1906). His dialogues put across the special Russian pronunciation and sentence structures used by Jews; both Yushkevich and Babel learned a great deal from him, and the later may have been influenced also by the parable-like concentration of some of his works. He died in Detskoe Selo.

Main works

Black Days, 1904

Burning Bush, 1907

Flood of Blood, 1908

Home... home... home, 1908

Drifting Ice, 1909

The Heart of Being, 1909

Wives, 1909

Collected Works 1-2, 1906-1910

Collected Works 1-8, 1911-1919

Editor Solntsev, 1936

Semyon AN-SKY
(Shlomo-Zanvl ben Akiva Rappoport)
(1863-1920)

Born in an Orthodox Jewish family in the province of Vitebsk. He learned Russian at the age of 17, and became an adherent of the Haskala. He joined the Narodniki, worked as a bookbinder and a blacksmith, and lived in villages in southern Russia, teaching Russian peasant children, until he was chased away because he was Jewish. Next he worked in salt and coal mines, and held literary readings to workers. He wrote his first stories in Yiddish, but his publisher advised him to write "sensational novels" instead, so from then on, Ansky wrote in Russian, and about Russian themes. He tried his hand at Russian genre pieces at the advice of Gleb Uspensky, and moved to St. Petersburg, writing for Narodnik journals. In 1892 he left Russia to see the world, living first in Germany, then in Switzerland, and settling in Paris in 1894, where he was personal secretary to the Narodnik leader Piotr Lavrov until the latter's death in 1900. After 1904, he resumed writing in Yiddish while continuing to write in Russian too. The universal, though hidden message of his works was the necessity of retaining the Jewish identity.

In 1905 he returned home, and joined the SR party. He was the author of the hymn of the Bund, which later became the march of the Jewish workers' movement. The Hassidic legends and works of literature he wrote (also in Russian) in the wake of his folklore research brought a renewal of Yiddish culture. Between 1911 and 1914 financially supported by Baron Ginzburg, he lead ethnographic expeditions to the villages of Volhynia and Podolia, where he also found fundamental material for his theatre play *Dybbuk*, which was later to become a world-wide success.

During World War I, An-sky worked in organizations aiding Jewish refugees. In 1917 the SR Party elected him a deputy of the National Constituent Assembly (to be dispersed by the Bolsheviks). In 1918 he participated in the reorganization of the Jewish community of Vilna. After the war, he moved to

Warsaw, where he died. His works were published in 15 volumes after his death, in Yiddish (Warsaw 1920–5), including, besides poems, stories, reminiscences, another unfinished play, *Day and Night*, as well as Three volumes of notes on the destruction wrought on the Jewish communities and cultural heritage of Galicia, Bukovina and Poland.

Main works (written in Russian)

Pseudonym, 1893 = *Stepchild*, 1894

In a Tavern, 1866

On the Estate, 1866

On to New Lands, 1889

Bargains, 1892

Mendel the Turk, 1904

Destroyers of Fences, 1904

Father and Son, 1906

New Stream, 1907

The Dybbuk, 1913

**Isaac Emmanuilovich BABEL
(1894–1940)**

Born in Odessa in a family of merchants. The details described in his “autobiographical” stories, however, are not true to the facts: in Babel’s childhood the family was still well-to-do. He was witness to the 1905 Odessa pogrom. Following early Talmudic and Hebrew studies, he finished a commercial secondary school at the age of 15, then became a student at the Kiev financial and commercial academy. He moved to, and lived in Petrograd till 1917.

He wrote his first stories in French. As opposed to the information of most encyclopaedias, his first work, a very typical Russian-Jewish story, *Old Shloyme* appeared first not in 1916 (in Gorky’s periodical) but in Kiev in 1913. Gorky helped the young writer with advice and, according to the legend eagerly spread by Babel himself, sent him “to the people” to gather experience, which resulted in seven years of wandering and silence. In reality, however, Babel wrote a lot during those seven years: sketches and stories, many of which, nearly fifty in number, were actually published. He also gained a great deal of experience: in his autobiography he lists a host of various professions. In 1920 spent three months as a war reporter with the First Cavalry Army in

the Polish Campaign where he wrote a diary. This diary subsequently got lost: Babel's wife went into emigration in Paris in 1925, and the chequered notebooks were left in the Kiev house she had lived in. The woman who found them was too frightened to look for Babel's widow and to pass it on to her right until 1956 (after the official "rehabilitation" of Babel in 1954), when she gathered her courage. The complete text of *Diary 1920* could be published only in 1990.

Babel's two great works are two cycles of short stories whose theme is very different, but they are highly similar in mood and tone. *Odessa Tales* (1923) is a nostalgic, anecdotal and dazzling portrayal of the romantic world of Odessa's Jewish gangsters in the last moments before its downfall, while *Red Cavalry* (1926) is a close-up of the new world, but mainly a mirror of the astonishingly well-balanced duality of the basic Jewish narrative approach. The Jewish past is stifling; still it represents the roots and the warmth of home, while the aggressive, macho self-confidence of the new world is attractive yet repulsive and terrifying in its brutality. *Red Cavalry* saw eight editions in seven years till 1933.

Babel also wrote two theatre plays as well as film scenarios, yet his whole life-work, including the diaries, adds up to no more than two volumes. In the thirties the volume of his output dwindled, and he wrote with increasing difficulty, publishing even less. According to witnesses, he collected his manuscripts, which he would go on chiselling for many months until the last redundant word was stricken out, in a huge wooden box. Some fragments and scattered publications point to the possibility that he was preparing to write a work on collectivization, and in some of his letters he hints at a novel he was going to write on the Cheka. He was arrested in 1939, the box was taken, and not a single word of its content turned up again (from the archives of the KGB). His works were banned formally until 1957, and remained banned informally until the 1980s, when also, the date and the circumstances of his death—he was shot in the Lubyanka prison in Moscow on 27 January 1940—came to light.

Main works

Old Shloyme, 1913

Childhood. At Grandmother's, 1915

Ilya Isaakovich and Margarita Prokofyevna, 1916

Mama, Rimma, Alla, 1916

Shabbos Nakhamu, 1918

Diary 1920, 1990

Odessa Tales, 1921–1926
Red Cavalry, 1923–1926
First Love, 1925
The Story of My Dovecot, 1926
Benya Krik, 1926
Wandering Stars, 1926
My First Fee, 1922–1928 (1963)
Sunset, 1928
The Awakening, 1931
Karl-Jankel, 1931
In the Basement, 1931
The Road, 1932
Froim Grach, 1933
Mariya, 1935

Mordekhai BEN-AMI
(Mordekhai/Mark Yakovlevich Rabinovich)
(1854–1932)

Born in Verkhovka, Ukraine, in an Orthodox family dominated by the memory of famous rabbinical ancestors, patriarchal order and utter respect for the traditions. Following the untimely death of his adored father the family fell into dire need, and Ben-Ami was sent to relatives where he served at the bar of a tavern. Tossed about a great deal in his childhood, he spent two years studying at the Odessa *yeshiva*, but left it at the wish of his relatives, and went to work first at a timber-yard, then in a grocery shop in Odessa. He was always fascinated by studying, so first he attended Talmud-Torah school while living in an orphanage, and then enrolled in a Russian grammar school two years later. From there he went on to the Kiev medical school, but dropped out and continued his studies at the Novorossiysk (Kiev) faculty of arts, which he did not finish either. His first published work was an article (1881) on the grave need for textbooks of Jewish schools, in which he positioned himself as an adherent of Jewish enlightenment but, also opposed to the assimilation tendencies of the Jewish intelligentsia. At the time of the 1881 pogrom he was one of the organizers of the self-defence troops in Odessa, and then went to Paris to intervene with the organisation Alliance Israélite in order to secure assistance for Jews fleeing from the pogroms to Galicia.

Between 1882 and 1884 he lived in Geneva, where he wrote his first stories (e.g. *Baal-Tefilo*, 1884). Returning to Odessa in 1887, he wrote a longer, autobiographically inspired work entitled *My Childhood* (1902–1905), evoking memories of traditional Jewish lifestyle in a nostalgic mood. Its sequel, *Wandering Years* (1906) remained unfinished. He soon came into contact with the Zionist movement. In 1905 he emigrated to Geneva, and gave up writing almost completely. All he wrote was a summarizing work in Yiddish (*A Night at the Shtetl*, 1909). (His first story written in Yiddish was published in Sholom Aleichem's series "Yiddish Popular Library".)

Ben-Ami settled in Palestine in 1923, and died in Tel-Aviv.

Main works

Excerpts, 1883

Chanukah, 1883

Purim, 1883

Arrival of the Tzaddik, 1883

Ben-Yuhid, 1884

Baal-Tefilo, 1884

Lag Baomer, 1886

Unexpected Happiness, 1886

Journey to Lithuania, 1894

Voice from the Desert, 1900–1901

My Childhood, 1902–1905

Stories for my Children, 1901–1905

Wandering Years, 1906

Grigory Isakovich BOGROV (1825–1855)

Born in Poltava. His father was a very poor but highly erudite Orthodox Jew who left literary essays and notes on astronomy behind when he died at the age of 87, preceding his son's death by ten years. He had his son educated in a strictly religious spirit: the *cheder* was the only school he attended until the age of 17, where he studied Hebrew and Talmudic and religious literature. At 17, he was forced into an unhappy arranged marriage by his parents, from which he could only break free with great difficulty. Following the divorce, he worked as a clerk at various leased estates. Living on his own gave him the long-awaited chance to study and educate himself: he could learn German and

French as well as play the violin. He began to write at the beginning of the sixties; that was when the first part of his autobiographically inspired novel about the life of the Russian Jewry in the 1830s and 1840s, *Notes of a Jew*, was born (1871–1873). The manuscript got to Nekrasov in a roundabout way, who urged the author to continue writing, and, according to their correspondence, stylized the text, and then published it in his journal *Otechestvennyie Zapiski*, provoking considerable reaction. The novel was published in a volume on its own in 1874, and also in German in 1880.

Bogrov moved to St. Petersburg, and devoted himself to writing, but could not reach the high standards of his first novel again, because the tendentious tone kept suppressing the writer whose talent was meagre anyway. On the other hand, every one of his works provides a wealth of evidence on the past and present, traditions, customs and living circumstances of Russian and, in general, East European Jews. His historical novel seeks for the origin of the antagonism between Ukrainians and Jews in the times of Bogdan Khmelnytsky, in the 17th century (*Jewish Manuscript. Before the Drama*, 1876).

He wrote essays and stories for Jewish periodicals, edited *Russkii Evrei* for a while, going over to *Rassvet* after a time, which, however, he was forced to leave because of his conflicts with the adherents of the national idea. In a letter to Levanda he professed being an emancipated cosmopolitan, who would not leave the Jews only because it would be immoral to leave four million sufferers devoid of their rights to their own fate. He condemned the idea of Palestine, and was an enthusiastic supporter of mixed marriages. He took up Christianity a few years—some say only a couple of months—before his death only to be able to marry his long-time companion, and legalize their children.

He died in the village Derevki in the province of Minsk. His works were published in seven volumes in Odessa (1912–1913), three of which were made up by his first novel.

Main works

Notes of a Jew, 1871–1872

Poimanik, 1873

Jewish Manuscript. Before the Drama, 1876

The Madwoman, 1878

The Litter of the Century, 1881 (unfinished)

Sad Chapter, 1883

A True Story, Miriam and Mary, 1883

The Maniac, 1884

Friedrich GORENSTEIN
(1932—2003)

Gorenstein was born in Kiev. His father was a professor of economy, arrested and executed in 1935. His mother went into hiding from the persecutions, and was constantly on the run until she died in 1941, during the city's evacuation. As a child, Gorenstein first lived with relatives, then in orphanages. After finishing school Gorenstein got a job as an unskilled worker, then studied at an academy for the mining industry, and worked as a miner and a mining engineer in the Urals and all over Ukraine, settling in Kiev in 1961. His literary career began with film scenarios, and his other work was hardly published at all. It is owing to this that Gorenstein is much better known as a screen writer than an author in his own right, in Russia as well as abroad. His work for the cinema includes scenarios for world-wide successes like Andrei Tarkovsky's famous *Solaris* (1972) and *Prisoners of Love* (1975), a film directed by Nikita Mikhalkov. He could publish only one short story *A Building with a Little Tower* (1964) before taking the decision to send his works abroad to let them be published in the West. He participated in the legendary samizdat *Metropol* almanach (1979), and was among those who were forced to emigrate (1980). He lived in West Berlin until his death.

Main works

A Building with a Little Tower (1964)

The Place (1969–1972, completed in 1976, published in 1983)

The Winter of '53 (1965, published in 1978)

Penance (1967, published: 1969)

Debates on Dostoevsky (1973)

Berdichev (1975, published: 1980)

Psalm (1975, published in French in 1984, in Russian in 1986)

Steps (1979, in *Metropol*)

Travelling Companions (1983)

Champagne with Bitter Anger (1986)

Spark (1984)

The Childkiller (1985)

Last summer at Volga (1988)

Dresden Passions (1993)

Semyon Grigoryevich HEKHT
(1903–1963)

Born in Odessa. After completing six years of school he worked as a messenger boy and a factory hand. His talent came to the attention of Eduard Bagritsky, and Isaac Babel included him among the authors of a planned anthology of Russian-Jewish short stories, in which he was to appear alongside Ilf and Paustovsky. Hekht found himself in “good company” also in Moscow, right in the famous editorial office of the satirical journal *Gudok*, a springboard for writers coming from the south, the starting place for the careers of Olesha, Bulgakov, Ilf and Paustovsky. He edited the collected works of Sholom Aleichem, and made translations into Yiddish. The inner conflicts and divisions of Jewry provide the topic of *The Man Who Forgot His Life* (1927). *The Ship Sails for Jaffa and Returns* (1936) is most likely the only literary work from this period in which Palestine is made the scene of a realistic plot. Some of his works were favourably received, like *An Illuminating Story* (1939), others much less so, and branded as hostile to Soviet ideology, as in the case of *Together* (1941). The former is a story of a young Jewish man who becomes an engineer with a degree.

At the time of the Stalinist reprisals, he was exiled to the north, and his works were blacklisted until 1955. The short novel *The Nightingale's Hovel* (1957) was inspired by memories of the northern countryside. The stories in the volume *Debt of the Heart* (1963) hinge upon searches for soldiers disappeared during the war. After his return from exile, he suffered from frequent illness. When he died in Moscow, Paustovsky remembered him as “the purest man on earth” in his obituary.

Main works

- A Simple Story About the Dead*, 1925
- The Man Who Forgot His Life*, 1927
- Penal Squadron*, 1929
- The Life of the Re-settled Bundlers*, 1930
- The Bootmaker's Son*, 1931
- The Ship Sails for Jaffa and Returns*, 1936
- Narrow Track*, 1938
- An Illuminating Story*, 1939
- Together*, 1941
- The Nightingale's Hovel*, 1957
- Debt of the Heart*, 1963

Vladimir JABOTINSKY
(Zeev Zhabotinskii)
(1880-1940)

Born in Odessa. His first publication was an attack on the grade system in schools. At the age of 17 he created a brilliant translation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven". At 18 he went to study to Bern, then to Rome. He earned his tuition fees as a foreign correspondent of two big Odessa newspapers. In Switzerland he participated in rallies of left-wing Jewish students, and spoke about the resettlement of Jews in Palestine (Eretz Israel) as an inevitable necessity.

He returned to Russia in 1901, and gained increasing fame owing to his articles in the liberal press (written under the pseudonym "Altalena"). He wrote a few plays of rather moderate importance (*Blood, It is Fine*), which were performed also by Russian theatres. In 1903, at the impact of the Kishinev pogrom, he became increasingly committed to Zionism, and organized volunteer Jewish self-defence groups. He was sent by the Russian Zionists as a delegate to the 6th Zionist Congress, the last attended by Theodor Herzl. He learned Hebrew, and translated Byalik's works into Russian (which were published in 1904 and 1911). He married in 1907; his wife was Anna Markovna Galperina, and they had a son born in 1910.

He was actively engaged in the revitalization of the Hebrew language, taking part in the establishment of the Hebrew University in Palestine. The subject of his play *Foreign Land* is the controversial position of the Jewish youth participating in the revolutionary movement: regarded as strangers, they are not accepted by the Russian masses; therefore, according to Jabotinsky, Jews have no place in the Russian revolutionary movement. They should devote their full energy to raising the poorest Jewish strata and to the rebirth of Jewry instead of that. In 1909 and 1910 he headed the Zionist propaganda centre in Istanbul. In 1915, together with Joseph Trumpeldor, he organized a Jewish battalion (the Zion Mule Corps) to fight against the Turks in Palestine; it was his view that the Jewish blood shed in battle would secure the right for future generations to "consolidate the right of Jews to settle in their historical homeland." Between 1915 and 1917 he was engaged in political activity in London, resulting in the establishment of a Jewish battalion within the British Army. He left Russia for good in 1916. His book on the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, *Turkey and the War*, appeared in London in 1917. In 1918 and 1919 he served in the British army himself as an officer of the Jewish Battalion. In 1919 he quit the British Army, in protest, according to some sources,

because of the anti-Zionist attitude of the army high command. Other sources, however, maintain that he was forced to leave by the British. He warned that Arab pogroms may be in the offing, and organized a self-defence force when they actually took place, during the pogroms of Jerusalem in April 1920. He was arrested by the British along with nineteen associates, and was sentenced to 15 years of prison. However, in the wake of a wave of protests locally, then in Britain, and finally also world-wide, he was released together with the others. Between 1921 and 1923 he was one of the leaders of the country's Zionist organizations. He took a stand against Britain because he was convinced that the British would never fulfill the promises they had made to the Jews. In 1923 he renounced his office because the organization led by Chaim Weizmann made a compromise with the British. Jabotinsky launched the Revisionist Movement, demanding a reappraisal of the relationship of Zionists with Britain. He established a publishing house for the education of future Jewish generations in a national spirit. At the publishers Ha-Sepher in Berlin, he made preparations for the publication of the first geographical atlas in Modern Hebrew.

In 1923 in Riga, the youth movement Betar (an acronym for Berit Yosif Trumpeldor, "Joseph Trumpeldor League") was founded, which elected him president. In 1925 Jabotinsky started an opposition movement in the Zionist trade unions. He was editor of the "third", Zionist *Rassvet*, appearing now in Western Europe, first in Berlin between 1922 and 1924, and then in Paris, and published an article in nearly every issue. In 1928 he settled in Palestine, and edited the daily *Vestnik*. He took a highly active part in politics, and was sharply critical of the British authorities as well as Arab extremists. When he travelled to South Africa for a lecture tour the authorities of the British Mandate did not permit him to return to the country, so he got stuck in the Diaspora for the rest of his life.

At the 17th Zionist congress in Basel in 1931, on behalf of his organization, he demanded that a declaration should be issued announcing that the goal of the Zionist movement was the establishment of the State of Israel. The congress refused to discuss the proposal. In 1933 Jabotinsky made an appeal for the boycotting of Nazi Germany. In 1934 he signed a pact with David Ben-Gurion for cooperation between the two wings of the Zionist movement, but this was not accepted by the unions (London Agreement). He called for a world-wide trade boycott against Germany and opposed bargaining with Germany (about gaining permission for wealthy Jews to emigrate to Palestine). He established new trade unions, the goal of which was to establish the Jewish state and to fight for the free repatriation of Jews.

In 1936 he moved to London. He proposed that in order to prevent genocide, the million and a half strong Jewish population of East Europe should be evacuated to Palestine. The military organization of Jabotinsky's own movement, Etzel (Irgun Zvai Leumi), was founded in 1937, with himself as its Chief Commander. At their meeting in Egypt he raised the idea of massive illegal immigration, armed invasion of Palestine, its liberation and the establishing of the Jewish state. In 1938 he pursued diplomatic negotiations with the governments of the states where Jews were in a dangerous position. The Polish and Romanian government supported the idea of illegal "Aliyah" and the military preparations of the Etzel.

Beside his extensive publicist's activity continued in several languages and the translation of Classics into Hebrew (he translated Dante, Goethe, Rostand and Poe), he wrote his novels *Samson of Nazarite* (1927) and *The Five* (1936) in Russian. In the former, a probably autobiographically inspired theme, the loneliness of the popular leader, is embedded in a Biblical story (see Moses 4:6.1-2). The latter exposes the dead-end-streets, which Russia's Jews are running into, via the lives of five siblings of an assimilated Odessa family.

In 1939 he urged the summoning of a Zionist world congress which, however, had to be cancelled because of the outbreak of World War II. He raised the idea of a Jewish army to fight against Germany, and with this goal in mind he travelled to America in 1940. He died of a heart attack while visiting a Betar youth camp near New York.

In his last will, Jabotinsky asked that his remains be transported to Israel at the order of the Jewish government, thereby expressing his firm conviction that there *will* be an independent Jewish government sooner or later. Jabotinsky and his wife (1884-1949) were buried in Jerusalem, at the Mount Herzl cemetery, in 1964.

Main literary works

Foreign Land, 1907-1908 (1922)

Blood, 1901

It Is Fine, 1902

Poor Charlotte, 1903

Samson of Nazarite (a historical novel), 1927

Song About the Army (memoir), 1928

The Five, 1936

Aleksandr Abramovich KIPEN
(1870–1938)

Born in Melitopol. He graduated at an agricultural academy in Montpellier, France, in 1894. In the 1910s, he taught at the agricultural academy of St. Petersburg, and from 1920, he was Professor at the Odessa Academy of Agriculture. The subject of his scientific works was vine growing; one of them appeared in Yiddish, too, in 1913.

He began to publish literary works in 1903. His first story, *Meteorological Station*, appeared in *Russkoie Bogatstvo*. He published mainly in Marxist and Narodnik papers as well as in Russian-Jewish periodicals (*Znaniie, Vestnik Evropy*). Kipen's interest was captured mainly by the life of the workers of the southern regions and the time of the 1905 revolution. His documentary novella, *In October* (1905) describes the horrors of the Odessa pogrom with the authenticity of the eyewitness. The *Horse Trader* (1910) portrays a physically powerful and mentally self-confident Jewish character who rejects the life belt of conversion to Christianity as a false solution. His works raise the idea of overthrowing tyranny (*Gangrene*), but his best-turned-out stories are those employing the method of indirect portrayal (*At a Crossroads, Who Art in Heaven*). His dialogues authentically convey the southern Russian dialect and the Russian language spoken by Jews.

Main works

In October 1905

Horse Trader 1910

Naum Lvovich KOGAN
(N. Naumov)
(1863–1893)

Born in the province of Yekaterinoslav in a poor family. His father was a servant at an estate, later a corn-trade salesman, so Kogan travelled a great deal in his childhood within the Pale of Settlement. After the *cheder*, he enrolled in the Kherson grammar school, and from that time on he earned his living as a private tutor. He had to drop out of grammar school in the seventh form because of an attack of tuberculosis. With his condition improving, he began to attend the Academy of Veterinary Medicine in Kharkov, but his health did not permit him to finish his studies; he suffered a nervous breakdown, and

spent half a year in the mental ward of the University Clinic of Kharkov, an experience about which he wrote in detail in three short stories (*A Day in the Lunatic Asylum*, 1889). After he had to give up the idea of a diploma, he returned to Nikopol, one of the scenes of his childhood. He married, opened a private school with his wife, along with a library. However, because of a relapse of his illness, he soon had to move to the Crimea, where he earned his living by tuition, casual work as a clerk and by printing press jobs. He also wrote for the local papers, thus making enemies, and soon losing his pupils and jobs in consequence. (The director of the local grammar school warned Slav Orthodox Christian parents not to employ the Jewish tutor.) At that time he had three (and later five) children to provide for.

In 1889 he met Chekhov, who encouraged him. He also exchanged several letters with Korolenko; Kogan asked for his advice and accepted his suggestions. Publishing *In a Godforsaken Shtetl* (1892) was not easy: both the title and the name of the author had to be changed. Success, however, could not be kept away, thus encouraging Kogan to write on. At the same time his condition deteriorated; he travelled to the forests in the Gomel region at his doctors' advice, but fell ill during the journey, and died in the hospital of Yekaterinoslav at barely thirty years of age. His novella was published on its own in a slim little brochure in the year of his death and several times also later (1895, 1898), but the censor did not approve its translation into Hebrew. However, it appeared in English and German. His unfinished, posthumous work is entitled *The Jewess*.

Main works

In a God Forsaken Shtetl 1892

A Day in the Lunatic Asylum 1889

The Jewess (posth.)

Mikhail Emmanuilovich KOZAKOV (1897–1954)

Born at Ramodan station in the province of Poltava. His studies in Kiev were disrupted by the Civil War, in which he fought on the side of the Bolsheviks. He completed his legal studies in St. Petersburg in 1922. He was a journalist; his first book of stories appearing in 1924, *Parrot Fortune*, shows the influence of symbolism. His first short novel, *Petty Bourgeois Adameyko* (1927), embedded in a detective story recalling Dostoevsky, has an entirely different character, and deals with the disillusionment following the revolution. Kozakov was attacked by Soviet

criticism as a formalist writer. His story *The Man Who Falls on His Face* (1930) also displays his formal innovations. A collected edition of his works written thus far was published in four volumes between 1929 and 1931. *Nine Points* (1929–1937), creating little response in its own time, was integrated later on into his subsequent large-scale novel *Collapse of the Empire* (1956) as the first part of the work devoted to events between 1913 and 1917. He died in Moscow.

Main works

Parrot Fortune, 1924

Human Fold, 1924

Petty-Bourgeois Adameyko, 1927

The Man Who Falls on His Face, 1930

Nine Points, 1929–1930

Our Townspeople, 1955

Collapse of the Empire, 1956

Lev Osipovich LEVANDA (1835–1888)

Born in Minsk in a poor family. True to the customs of the times, he was enrolled in a *cheder* early, then was sent to D. A. Lurye's school, who tried to promote the adjustment of Jewish children to the new type of education prescribed by the Tsar's decree. For that reason he also taught general-knowledge subjects as well as Russian, and adapted the exterior appearance and dressing habits of his pupils to those of the surrounding population. After the closing down of this Talmud-Torah school in 1846, Levanda attended a state Jewish school for three years, then went to Vilna on his own, where he entered the fourth form of the rabbinical training college, soon catching his teachers' attention by his excellent gifts and great diligence. In 1854 he began teaching at the Minsk state school with his teacher's diploma, and from 1860 almost to his death (in 1886), he was the "learned Jew" of the governor of Vilna, which involved mediation, translation and participation in legal affairs between Jews and government organs. He spoke several languages, and was highly familiar with Russian and West-European literature. In his free time he wrote for the local papers, mainly brief literary sketches under the pen-name Ladnev. From 1865 on, he edited the *Vilna Province Gazette*.

At the first signs of the reformist changes to come in the 1860s, he wrote a letter to Osip Rabinovich, proposing the publication of a Russian-language

Jewish organ; he was unaware that Rabinovich had already applied for permission to launch *Rassvet*, of which Levanda became an enthusiastic collaborator. His first work, *Shop of Imported Far-East Groceries* (1860) appeared there. Following the banning of *Rassvet*, and then its successor, *Zion*, he began to write for liberal St. Petersburg papers. At the same time he officially took part in the work of the Vilna committee planning changes for the life of Jews, and also wrote a textbook for Jewish schools. After the *Jewish Library* (*Evreiskaia Biblioteka*) was launched by Landau in 1871, followed by *Voskhod* in 1881, Levanda published his works in these; first his great novel *Turbulent Times* (in an independent volume in 1875).

Levanda wrote his novel as an adherent of the Russian utopia. He thought that Russian culture would offer an adequately receptive environment for Jews running away from the ghetto spirit of Jewry and yearning for assimilation, a Jewry which should turn Russian in every respect except its religion. He worked for every Russian-Jewish paper, and his works were published one after the other, including *How Pardon Was Granted by the Angered Baron* and *Avram Iozefovich*. After 1879, Levanda began an especially vigorous journalistic activity, sketching out his assimilation programme in the newly launched *Russkii Evrei*, according to which in "a shared motherland," Russia, the Russian Jew "will be a Russian citizen differing only in the shade of his religion." Even in 1890 he still believed that the ostentatious behaviour of Jews is also one of the reasons of Jew-hatred (*Chronicle by the Vistula*). Next year, however, he already writes that the gulf dividing Jewish and Russian people form one another was dug and kept deepening by the restrictive measures (*Where the Difficulty of Solving the Jewish Question Lies*, 1881). He professed being a Russian, calling independent Palestine, the dream of so many, "a galvanized mummy," but after pogroms his views went through a dramatic change, and he spoke out in support of the Palestine Party (*The Essence of the So-Called Palestine Movement*, 1884).

His mind became unhinged in 1886, and he spent his last years in a mental asylum in St. Petersburg. The sources and those remembering keep tactfully silent about his illness. A single work, *Old Jewish Wedding Customs*, was all that was found in his legacy.

Main works

Shop of Imported Far-East Groceries, 1860

Stories of the Past, 1870

Turbulent Times, 1871–1873

Travel Sketches, 1873

School Dread, 1875

How Pardon Was Granted by the Angered Baron, 1885

Avram Iozefovich, 1887

Iashka and Ioshka, published in 1889

Lev Natanovich LUNTS
(1901-1924)

Lunts graduated from the Department of Roman Languages of the University of St. Petersburg in 1922, and stayed at the university as an assistant lecturer. In 1921 he was one of the organizers and main theorist of the apolitical literary group, the Serapion Brothers. In his manifesto *Onward To the West!* he advocated a literature free from politics and ideology, and an autonomous art. Their objective, together with his friend Veniamin Kaverin, was to emulate West-European literary development, and to restore literary narrative to its former position. His works appeared in Berlin and St. Petersburg. His play *Outside the Law*, showing the process whereby a popular leader seizing power by revolution and advocating freedom turns into a tyrant, was banned before its premiere in 1923 but performed in Berlin, Vienna and Prague later. His health undermined by work and hunger, he emigrated to his parents in Berlin for medical treatment, where he died from a clot in his brain.

Main works

Outside the Law, 1921

The Apes are Coming, 1921

In the Desert, 1921

Motherland, 1922

Bertrand de Born, 1922

The City of Justice, 1923

Patriot, 1923

Osip Aaronovich RABINOVICH
(1917-1869)

Born in Kobelyaki (in the province of Poltava). His father was a wealthy tax-farmer, a follower of the traditions and the Haskala at the same time, thus he provided an exceptional education for his son by the standard of the times:

beside Talmud-Torah studies he was also permitted to learn foreign languages, music and natural sciences. His father made him marry at the age of 18, and, even though he pursued legal studies at home, he enrolled at the medical faculty of the University of Kharkov because the faculty of law did not admit Jews. His father, however, went bankrupt, and Rabinovich had to break off his studies and look for a money-earning profession. For a few years he tried his hand at trade, tax-farming and a legal career. In 1845 he moved to Odessa, and worked as a jury lawyer in the city, then in 1848 he was elected notary by the municipal дума and the society of merchants. Later he was appointed city councilman, and took part in city planning.

He began his literary career with translations from Hebrew to Russian (1847). In the article "The New Synagogue in Odessa" (1848) he set forth his views on some of the absurdities of Jewish religious life as a genuine Maskil, already displaying his gifts as a satirist. His next article, "On the Pretext of a Good Word" (1848), turns to Russian readers, asking them to look at Jews without prejudice. This "two-front struggle" (sharp criticism inside the community for the sake of improvement, and defence against attacks from outside as well as an outward-directed enlightening reformist activity) is a permanent feature of his works.

Rabinovich's first novel (*The History of the Trading House Firlich and Company*, 1849) has a non-Jewish subject, while the second is, to all intents and purposes, the first work of Russian-Jewish prose to speak of. *Morits Sefardi* (1850) is intended to show through the life of an enlightened Jewish young man that education and adherence to the Haskala are not enough for happiness, and a man may be unhappy even at the peak of his career. The language of the novel renders the special speech of Jews and the tone of Yiddish by the use of mirror translations. *Kaleidoscope* (1856), excerpts from which appeared under the subtitle *Strolling Players*, is similar in mood, and the real protagonist of the novel is the colourful town of Odessa itself.

Rabinovich turned once and for all toward the problems of Jews under the impact of the reforms instituted by Alexander II. First he explained in two articles, both of which would become famous, that Jews must neither humiliate themselves nor be ashamed of their origin, but, quite to the contrary, they must represent the Jewish people with dignity and decency (*Moshkas and Yoshkas, Obsolete Views at the Light of Day*, 1858). Rabinovich's highly influential novel *Refractory Soldier* appeared in 1859, and made considerable impact also on Russian readers by its description of the inhuman cruelty of the anti-Jewish laws in force under Nicholas I. The book found its way even to Jewish houses where not a single Cyrillic character was allowed in until then,

and was published also in English and German. The second volume of the two-volume *Images of the Past*, entitled *The Inherited Candlestick* (1860), is the tragic story of a Jewish family, which, however, also provides glimpses of the author's gift for irony in the background.

In 1860 he founded the review *Rassvet*, the first Russian-Jewish periodical, in which he published 39 major editorials during its existence, the best of Rabinovich's journalistic output. After finding that his faith in Russian liberal governance, on which his two-front struggle had been based, was sheer utopia, and his "adopted country" would never permit the appearance of articles written in the interests of equal rights for Jews, he decided to close his paper down. He also retired from Jewish publicist work. His subsequent articles dealt with topics like the need for railways in southern Russia and town planning. It was at this time, however, that he wrote his brilliantly comical work set in a Jewish milieu and built on an anecdote, which was the forerunner of Odessa literature, Sholom Aleichem, and the subsequent satirists (*A Story about How Reb Khayim-Shulim Feigis from Kishinev Journeyed to Odessa, and What Happened to Him*, 1865).

He suffered from frequent illness in the last years of his life, underwent medical treatments abroad, and died in Meran in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (which is in today's Italy).

Main works

Morits Sefardi, 1850

Kaleidoscope, 1856

Moshkas and Yoshkas, 1858

Obsolete Views at the Light of Day, 1858

Refractory Soldier, 1859

The Inherited Candlestick, 1860

Story About How Reb Khayim-Shulim Feigis from Kishinev Journeyed to Odessa, and What Happened to Him, 1865

Yakov ROMBRO (1858-1922)

According to some sources he was born in the province of Vilna (Zhuprani), according to others in Podolia (Khodaki). He wrote both in Russian and Yiddish. His father was a tax-farming clerk working under Baron Ginzburg, a patron of the arts and a famous supporter of Jewish culture. At home he was

taught by *melamedim*, then went to the Rabbinical Training College in Zhitomir. Parallel with that, he completed the Russian real grammar school in Kremenchug, continuing his studies at the St. Petersburg Polytechnic School. During his student years he was close to the Narodnik revolutionaries. After the assassination of Alexander II he fled to Paris, read literature at the Sorbonne, and was one of the organizers of the Jewish Workers' Society.

He began to publish in 1880, mainly studies and articles (he wrote the first one on Spinoza). In 1883 he moved to London, and worked in international workers' organizations. From 1855 on, he wrote mainly in Yiddish, and edited the newspaper *London Arbeiter Freund*. His journalist's pen name was Filip Krantz. In 1890 he was invited to New York to take over the socialist paper *Arbeiter Zeitung* as chief editor. He was editor of several papers between 1892 and 1905 (*Zukunft*, *Abend Blatt*, *Arbeiter Welt*). He was active in Socialist parties, and was a deputy of the American Social Democratic Party at the congress of the Second International in 1899. Rombro worked not only at Socialist papers but also at American-Jewish middle class newspapers as well as at a Yiddish publishing house.

At the end of 1906 he travelled to Warsaw and accepted the request of the Polish Socialist Party to edit their Yiddish-language paper, *Di Prolaterishe Velt* (Vilna and Warsaw, 1907-). At the same time he also worked as the Russian correspondent of American Jewish papers. In 1914 he returned to America, and edited a Yiddish paper again. He wrote several brochures, the basic argument of which was that Rombro regarded the Jewish people as a nation, and assimilation a private matter for every single Jewish person. He also wrote works aimed at disseminating knowledge in Yiddish, including a three-volume *Life of Great Men* (New York, 1910), covering, among others, portraits of Baar Kochba, Josephus Flavius, Sabbatai Zvi, Mohammed and Lev Tolstoy. Rombro regarded as equally important to spread knowledge about North and South America (New York, 1915; 2nd edition: 1929), the French Revolution (New York, 1903; 3rd edition: 1918) or astronomy (New York 1918; 13th edition: 1929). His Yiddish translations also deserve mention (Flaubert: *Salambo*, A. Dumas: *The Man in the Iron Mask*). He published a history of American Yiddish literature in 1899-1900. He died in New York.

Main works in Russian

Notes of a Mad Orem-Bokher, 1881

Cholera Wedding, 1884

Andrei SOBOL
(Yuli Mikhailovich/Izrail Moiseevich Sobol)
(1886–1926)

His father was a junior clerk in Saratov, who died early; Sobol moved to Lithuania with his mother. He graduated with distinction at the state Jewish school, then left home, and travelled all over Russia. In 1902 in Perm he learned the material of four grammar-school forms in three months, and got his *matura* as a private student. He studied and educated himself methodically. He joined the group of Zionist Socialists and moved from Perm to a small town in the province, where he became a pharmacist's assistant because that made it possible for him to get a residence permit.

He began his literary career with Zionist poems accusing Jews of cowardice and subservience. He published a poem on the Kishinev pogrom in the manner of Byalik. In 1904 he was a prompter at the operetta theatre in Kazan. At the age of 16 he joined SR party, and took an active part in the 1905 revolution. In 1906, at the age of 18, he was arrested: weapons and illegal literature were discovered in his home when it was house-searched. He was charged of being a member of a militant organization and sentenced to four year's forced labour and exile for life. He was moved from prison to prison for a years and a half, inciting revolt and hunger-strikes everywhere. He ended up at the railways construction work going on along the river Amur, which broke his physical and mental health utterly. He also made the friendship of the leaders of the SR party in exile. This period was lost from the point of view of literary creation.

In 1909 he escaped from the penal colony, fled across the border and lived in countries in Western Europe, sending home short stories written under the pen-name Andrei Nezhdanov (from 1913 on). In 1915 he travelled home through Serbia on a false passport, and was a war correspondent at the Caucasian front. Following the February revolution he joined a military academy but he did not finish it, but became a Commissar of the Provisional Government.

Sobol's literary works are, almost without exception, autobiographically inspired, and have two Jewish prototypes in their centre: the weak-willed, continually pondering and self-reflecting "former Talmudist," who is doomed to death, and the self-confident revolutionary who knows no such thing as doubt. It is the latter who wins the love of the Bundist heroine of *Song of Songs* (1917). In his short story *Slow Stream* (1918), a kind of condensed family saga, he depicts the variants of Russian Jewry, and the figure of the strong and

tough character, the Jewish conqueror of the Siberian taiga in that of the father. The novel *Dust* (1914) is about Jewish and Russian terrorist revolutionaries, between whom walls are erected later by anti-Semitism. His first book of short stories appeared in Moscow in 1916. Sobol was editor of several volumes publishing Jewish authors as well as that of certain works by Sholom Aleichem. His prose volumes *On Forced Labour*, *In a Foreign Land* and *Nightmare* were published in 1917.

Following the October Revolution, he withdrew from politics. During the Civil War he travelled to southern Russia, where he was arrested both by the Whites and the Reds. In Odessa he barely escaped being shot by the Cheka: his life was saved by Mikhail Osorgin, a fellow writer. In 1922 he became secretary of the leadership of the Moscow writers' union. In 1923 he published an open letter in *Pravda*, "repenting his crimes", mainly his past as an SR, and "recognised" Soviet power. In 1925, however, he criticized the party resolution disbanding all writers' groups, protested against party control over the arts, and he was mocked as "pedestrian" and a "waxworks man" by Soviet critics in return. Gorky did not like him either.

The novel *Salon Car*, written in 1922, represents the peak of his art. A revolutionary who has experienced the trials of forced labor, is confronted, as a commissar of the Provisional Government (an autobiographical motif), with the fact that the revolution is nothing but a bloody massacre, and is unable to change events. The work, interwoven with fantastic elements, and its dynamic, rhythmically composed, impressionistic prose, display Sobol's art of form at its best.

Although his career as a writer was seemingly successful, Sobol sunk into deep depression, and after several suicide attempts, he shot himself in the head on a bench at one of Moscow's busiest boulevards. His agony was long and he suffered horribly. At his funeral, many speeches were heard, including some by former fellow-forced laborers. His suicide happened one year later than Esenin's, and four years before Mayakovsky's. His work remained unpublished not only in the Stalinist period but right until 1989. He is remembered with sympathy by Ehrenburg in his memoirs (*Men, Years, My Life*, 1961). In *Werther Has Been Written Already*, a book by Kataev written with anti-Semitic undertones, he is ridiculed under the pseudonym "Fawn" along with his novel.

Main works

Dust, 1915

Song of Songs, 1917

On Forced Labour, 1917
Nightmare, 1917
Slow Stream, 1918
Men of Foot, 1916–1918
Salon Car, 1922
Get Up and Walk, 1922
Cellar, 1922
Ruins, 1923
Man Overboard, 1924
Waxworks, 1925
Reminiscences of a Freckled Man, 1926
Collected Works, 1926; 1928

Sergei Osipovich YAROSHEVSKY
(?–1907)

Very little is known about the life of Yaroshevsky. His works appeared on the pages of *Voskhod* from 1881 onwards. *The Pioneer* (1882) introduces a young girl with enough courage to break out of the stranglehold of the Jewish family and the Jewish traditions. *Different Trends* (1882), and its sequel *In a Maelstrom* (1882), whose title was borrowed for the title of my book, and which reacts to the horrible events of the pogroms, were followed by genuine novels, *On the Road* (1885), *Mezhpolye People* (1891–1893) and *Roza Maingold* (1897).

In the post-pogrom period, Yaroshevsky refused to join any Jewish political trend, and, pushed to the periphery, even stopped writing for a considerable time. In 1901, however, he still published a smaller work (*Holy Gift*), after which he fell completely silent. His son committed suicide in 1907, and over his body Yaroshevsky also ended his own life.

Main works

The Pioneer, 1882
Different Trends, 1882
In a Maelstrom, 1883
On The Road, 1885
Mezhpolye People, 1891–1893
Roza Maingold, 1897
Holy Gift, 1901

Semyon Solomonovich YUSHKEVICH
(1869-1927)

Born in the harbour district of Odessa, Yushkevich grew up in a huge tenement house crammed with apartments and families. He attended a Russian-language Jewish school, then Municipal Grammar School Number 2, but disliked learning, and played in the yard and the streets with his friends all day long instead. He was expelled from the third form for laziness, and became a private student from then on. It was at that time, at the age of about 12 that he began to write, but he published his first short stories in local papers "only" at the age of 17. In the same year, at 17, he also graduated from grammar school as a private student. In Kiev he completed an exam to obtain documents to be able to work as an assistant pharmacist, married and broke ties with his parents and family for two years. The year 1888 finds him in Odessa again, looking for a job and working here and there as a pharmacist. In 1893 he went to Paris and enrolled in the medical university. Moving in émigré circles, he also wrote, and his first story to appear, *The Taylor (A Jewish Genre Picture)* was published in 1897 on the pages of *Russkoie Bogatstvo*. His previously written novella, *Falling Apart* (1895), which appeared in *Voskhod* only in 1902, was found too grim and pessimistic by Korolenko. Yushkevich married for a second time in 1901, and returned to Russia with a medical diploma, but by then he already knew his calling was literature. His work drew Gorky's attention, who published his collected stories, and published his stories in the volumes of *Znaniie* one after the other along with works by authors like Ivan Bunin, Leonid Andreyev and Aleksandr Kuprin. After 1905, Yushkevich went over to the publishers Shipovnik, which took the side of the Symbolists and stood in a polemic with Gorky and his circle.

He wrote his first play in 1905 (*In the City*). After the premiere it was banned by censorship, and could not be played again for a long time. The play *Money* (1907) was booed off the stage by its Jewish audience, and taken off the program. However, the next play, *King* (1908), even though banned, was a huge success played all over the country, and *Miserere* (1910) and *The Comedy of Marriage* (1910) were also kept on the repertoire of various theatres for years. They were followed in 1913 by an autobiographically inspired story, *Doves*, then by another play, *Mendel Spivak (The "Father")* (1914) which, after the premier, was not included in the program of the Mariinsky Theatre. His last play, *Mr Sonkin* (1917) conquered audiences not only in Odessa and other Russian cities but was also staged successfully in Italy, in Vienna, the Scandinavian countries and even in America.

In 1919 he completed his big three-volume novel *Leon Drei* (1908–1919), which was soon to appear also in German and Polish. In 1918–1919 he ran a publishing company in Odessa, which did good business despite the Civil War. When Soviet rule set in, however, everything collapsed, and in 1920, threatened with dire poverty, Yushkevich escaped abroad at the risk of his life across the Romanian border. He went to Paris, and then on to America with his family (he may have been looking for a Jewish environment), where he discovered with great astonishment that his plays had been running in a number of theatres for years without permission and without him getting paid a penny of royalty. Making a lecture tour, he collected enough money to last him for the next couple of years. In 1921 he settled in Paris, where he wrote *Episodes*, and also tried his hand at film scenarios (*Five Jules's*). He stayed briefly in Berlin, then returned to Paris where he made an unsuccessful attempt to establish a Russian theatre.

In 1926 he had to travel to America again to battle theatres performing his plays without permission. The three-month struggle wore out his nerves and undermined his health. He returned to Paris with a grave heart-disease and died on 12 February, 1927. His funeral was attended by a bevy of Russian émigré celebrities like his friend Ivan Bunin, Vladislav Khodasevich, Mark Aldanov, Pavel Milyukov, Lev Shestov, Boris Zaitsev, Mikhail Struve, Nina Berberova, Mark Vishniak, Sholem Asch and Jasha Heifetz as well as several editorial staffs and schools turning out in full number. According to a report on the funeral in *Posledniie Novosti*, the body of the writer was laid to rest in Paris's new Jewish cemetery in a double coffin, with a welded-down zinc coffin inside the oak coffin, making it possible to transport Yushkevich's body to Russia when the time comes.

Main works

The Taylor, 1897

The World of God, 1900

Notes of the Student Pavlov, 1900

Inn-Keeper Heiman, 1900

Ita Haine, 1901

Falling Apart (1895), 1902

Man, 1903

Jews, 1904

In a City, 1905

Hunger, 1906

Evreii, 1906

Money, 1907

King, 1908

Collected Works 1-5, 1903-1908

Miserere, 1910

The Comedy of Marriage, 1910

Street, 1911?

Doves, 1913

Mendel Spivak (The "Father"), 1914

Luftmensch, 1915

Ita's Town, 1916

Mr Sonkin, 1916-1917

Leon Drei, 1918-1919

Episodes, 1921-1922

APPENDIX

Commonly found spelling variants of the authors' names appearing in this book

As found in this volume	Uses of first and last names elsewhere
Aizman, David Yakovlevich	Iakovlevich
Aleichem, Sholom (Rabinovich, Sholem Naumovich)	Alekhem, Sholem (Sholom/Shulem/Solomon, Rabinovitz/Rabinovitch)
Andreyev, Leonid Nikolaievich	Andreev, Andrejew
An-sky, S. (Semyon) [Shloyme Zanol Rappoport]	(Shloime/Solomon Seinwil) Ansky/An-ski, Semion
Asch, Sholem	Ash, Shalom
Bely, Andrei	Andrey
Ben-Ami, Mordekhai	(Rabinowicz) Mordechai
Bogrov, Grigory	Bogrow
Bryusov, Valery	Briusov
Byalik, Khaim	Bialik
Chernikhovsky, Saul	Chernikovsky
Chukovskaya, Lidia	Chukovskaia
Dubnow, Simon	Dubnov/Doubnov, Shimon/Semon/Semyon Mey- erovich/Markovich
Durisin, Dionys	Dionyz
Ehrenburg, Ilya	Erenburg
Eliashevich, Dmitri Arkadievich.	El'iashevich, Elyashevich
Engel, Joel	Engel, Iuly/Yuly
Fadeyev, Aleksandr	Fadeev
Gessen, Iulii	Iuly, Yuly
Ginzburg, Baron David	Goratsievich Gūnzburg/Gintsburg
Ginzburg, Baron Horace	Gūnzburg/Gintsburg, Horatius/Goratsii Evzelevich
Ginzburg, Shaul	Saul
Gorenstein, Friedrich Naumowitsch	Gorenshtein, Fridrikh
Gorky, Maxim	Gorkii, Maksim

As found in this volume	Uses of first and last names elsewhere
Hekht, Semyon	Gekht, Semion
Jabotinsky, Vladimir	Zhabotinsky, Zeev
Karatygin, Vyacheslav	Viacheslav
Kelner, Viktor Efimovich	Kel'ner
Khmelnitsky, Bogdan	Khmelnitski
Levanda, Vitaly Osipovich	Levanda, Vitalii Osipovitch
Lunts, Lev	Lunz
Mandelstam, Leon	Mandelshtam, Leon
Mandelstam, Osip	Mandelshtam, Osip
Markish, Shimon	Simon
Moykher Sforim, Mendele (Abramovitsh, Sholem Yakov)	Mokher/Moikher, Seforim/Sfarim (Abramovich, Yankev)
Mikhailovsky, Nikolai Konstantinovich	Mikhaylovsky/Mikhailovskii, Nikolay
Milyukov, Pavel	Miliukov
Peretz, Isaac Leib	Perets/Perec, Isaac/Yitskhok Loeb/Leybush
Petlyura, Simion	Petliura
Petrovsky-Shtern Yohanan	Petrovski-Shtern, Iohanan
Pilnyak, Boris Andreyevich	Pilniak
Pinsker, Leon	Lev
Rabinovich, Osip Aaronovich	Rabbinowitz
Saltykov-Shchedrin, Mikhail	Saltikov Shechedrin, Schedrin
Sobol, Andrei	Sobol', Andrey
Svatikov, S. G.	Svatykov
Usyshkin	Usishkin
Varshavsky, Mark	Varshovskii
Vinaver, Maxim	Maksim
Vishniak, Mark	Vishnyak
Yaroshevsky, Sergey	Iaroshevsky, Sergei
Yushkevich, Semyon Solomonovich	Iushkevich/Ioushkevich, Semion/Semen
Zaitsev, Boris	Zaytsev
Zamyatin, Yevgeny Ivanovich	Evgeny

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INDEX

- acculturation, 24, 37, 38
Adorno, Theodor, 238
Aizman, David, x, 8, 12, 79, 110, 137, 139–148, 153, 163, 167, 179, 181, 208, 210, 232, 259–260, 286
Albahari, David, 30, 235n14
Aleichem, Sholem, 4, 9, 14, 50, 61, 62, 186, 248n35, 264, 267, 277, 280, 285
Alexander II, 14, 39, 42, 90, 92, 276, 278
allegory, allegorical, 23, 52, 61, 69–70, 79, 80, 100, 126, 130, 138, 183, 195, 196, 221
allusion/s, xii, 47, 117n4, 190, 193, 198, 222, 235, 247, 256
Alter, Robert, 10, 13, 22–23, 235n14
ambivalence, xiii, 52, 77, 186n41, 235n12, 244n27, 251, 256
America, American, USA, xii, 1, 2, 3, 5, 13, 15n34, 20–21, 30, 31, 45, 66n69, 74, 135, 181, 186, 229, 236n15, 241, 242, 257, 270, 278, 282, 283
Andreyev, Leonid, 151, 282, 285
Anecdote, 47, 48n28, 50, 55, 57, 61, 62, 68, 77, 84, 122, 205, 217, 248, 277
An-sky, Semyon, x, xi, xiii, 8, 17, 24, 97, 98, 119, 120–131, 163, 166, 167, 179, 260–261, 285
anti-Semitism, x, 6, 11, 26n63, 27, 29, 38, 51, 71, 89n1, 117n5, 132, 156, 161, 162, 165, 170, 173, 177–179, 201, 202, 204, 208, 210, 211, 222, 226, 241, 242, 280
apocalyptic, 172–173
apology, apologetic, 115, 166
Asch, Sholem, 14, 98, 122, 165, 283, 285
assimilation, x, xi, xii, xiii, 8, 14, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 37–38, 40, 43, 57, 64, 69, 77n93, 94, 95, 97, 98, 106, 108, 109, 110, 135, 152, 161, 167,

- 170, 172, 175, 177, 181, 196, 197, 202, 210, 212–213, 214, 215, 219, 220, 221, 223, 227, 229, 233, 235, 236n15, 240, 247, 248n35, 249–250, 253, 255, 256, 263, 274, 278
- Austro-Hungarian Empire, 14, 66, 277
- autobiography, autobiographical, 70, 71, 74, 99, 119, 139, 171n8, 180, 196, 205, 230n3, 261, 264, 265, 270, 279, 280, 282
- avant-garde, 129, 190
- Babel, Isaac, ix, x, xi, xii, 3–4, 10, 11, 12, 26, 30n69, 50, 54, 55n40, 56, 69, 102, 105, 108, 131, 136n41, 137, 155, 160, 166, 169n1, 172n9, 179–188, 196, 200, 203, 208, 213, 214, 219, 220, 221, 222, 225, 229–255, 259, 261–263, 267
- Bagritsky, Eduard, 200, 267
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, xiii, 81, 86, 230, 244, 249
- Balzac, Honoré, 51
- Bashkin, Vladimir, 118
- Beilis Trial (blood libel trial), 117n5, 123, 197
- Belinsky, Aleksandr, 97, 107
- Bely, Andrei 116, 190, 232, 246, 285
- Bellow, Saul, 3, 4, 16n38, 20n48, 213
- Bely, Andrei, 116, 190, 232, 246, 285
- Ben-Ami, Mordechai, x, 11, 12n29, 96, 97–100, 102, 113, 166, 263–264, 285
- Berlin, 41, 122, 150n57, 164n75, 195, 198, 236n15, 259, 266, 269, 275, 283
- Bettelheim, Bruno, 233, 251, 252n42, 253
- Byalik, Khaim, 121, 122, 125, 174, 198, 206, 246, 268, 279, 285
- Bible, Biblical, xi, 5, 47, 48, 79, 80, 84n107, 98, 120, 122, 190, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 198, 202, 222, 223, 224, 226, 234, 235, 239, 242, 256, 270
- Bikerman, Iosif, 19, 20n47, 21, 22
- Birnbaum, Nathan, 14, 21
- Birobidzhan, Jewish Autonomous Territory of Birobidzhan, 176, 205n89, 207
- Blok, Aleksandr, 116
- Bogrov, Grigory, x, 12, 41, 43, 44, 70–78, 79, 80, 96, 128, 135, 181, 203, 204, 205, 211, 248, 249, 250, 253n45&n46, 264–265, 285
- Bolshevik/s, 171, 172, 173, 208, 211, 260, 272
- Borovoi, Sergei, 178

- Bryusov, Valery, 198, 285
 Buber, Martin, xii, 23, 130–131, 195
 Budnitskii, Oleg 116n2, 171nn5–6–7
 Bulgakov, Mikhail, 200, 267
 Bund, 20, 127, 141, 171, 173, 212, 260, 279
 Bunin, Ivan, 165, 198, 282, 283

 Canetti, Elias, 98
 carnival, 58, 68, 81, 242, 244, 249, 256
 Catalogue, cataloguing, 233–238, 256
 Catherine II, 75, 241
 censorship, 39, 177, 221, 272, 282
 Chagall, Marc, 119
chalutz, *chalutzim*, 176
 Chekhov, Anton, 7, 8, 47n27, 101, 122, 196, 226, 272
 Chernikhovsky, Saul, 5, 174, 206, 285
 Chernovits language conference, 14, 117
 Chernyshevsky, Nikolai, 8
 child, childish, xii, 26, 27, 30, 45, 46, 48, 51, 53, 68, 71–72, 75–78, 79, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 93, 98, 99, 101, 106, 125, 126, 127, 132, 135–137, 139, 140, 142, 143, 144, 149, 152, 153, 154n62, 157, 158, 160, 161, 162, 165, 174, 175, 177, 178, 180, 181, 182, 186, 195, 198n76, 202–203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 216, 217, 219, 220, 221, 224, 225, 229–241, 245–257, 260, 261, 263, 265, 266, 271, 272, 273
 cholera wedding, 80–87, 204, 278
 Christ, 80, 106, 198, 202, 223, 224, 225, 239, 244, 250
 Christian, Christianity, 23, 24, 26, 27, 68, 71, 93, 106, 110, 111, 112, 113, 121, 137, 144, 146, 150, 161, 163n73, 171, 172, 174, 180, 197, 202, 219, 224, 237, 239, 241, 249–250, 257, 265, 271, 272
 Chukovskaya, Lidia, 226
 Civil War, 169, 173, 199, 203n85, 205, 244, 250, 272, 280, 283
 communism, communist, 116, 136, 169, 172, 178, 221, 234, 245, 250
 Conrad, Joseph, 32
 Conversion, converted, convert, 24, 68n72, 71, 110–113, 118, 121, 125, 126, 128, 132, 133, 171–172, 174, 180, 197, 219, 271
 “cosmopolitan,” 51, 71, 74, 176, 222, 265
 Cossack(s), 66, 70n76, 89, 133, 169n1, 178, 181, 187, 222, 231, 233, 234, 237, 247, 250
 Courses in Oriental Studies (“Jewish Academy”), 120

- customs, xii, 2, 31, 48–50, 54, 57, 63, 67, 77, 80, 81, 83, 85, 87, 99, 102, 111, 126, 140, 166, 174, 205, 265, 273, 274
- Dal', Vladimir, 49
- diary, 75, 140, 169n1, 171n8, 187–188, 197, 198, 222, 245, 252, 262
- Diaspora, xiii, 14, 18, 51, 98, 146, 269
- didactic, didacticism, 8, 65, 67, 69, 73, 82, 115, 127, 128, 129, 238, 253, 257
- dissimilation, 71
- distance (narrative), xiii, 50, 57, 61, 82, 83, 84, 85, 148, 179, 181, 197, 209, 230, 245, 246–247, 254, 256, 257
- documentarism, ix, 66, 77, 166–168, 238, 252, 257, 271
- doppelgänger*, 192
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor, 12, 75, 80, 150, 223, 225, 266, 272
- double cultural affiliation, 21, 23, 77, 171, 174n15, 188, 240
- Dreyfus Affair, 120, 140
- duality, xiii, 4, 20, 77, 98, 166, 180, 190, 206, 224, 231, 233, 234, 237, 245, 255, 256, 257, 262
- Dubnow, Simon, 17, 18, 37, 70n76, 90n2, 91n3, 93, 117n5, 119, 122, 171
- Đurisin, Dionys, 28, 29, 285
- Ehrenburg, Ilya, 10, 12, 13, 50, 86–87, 131, 204, 280, 285
- EIEO, Ethnographic Society (Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society), 119, 121, 123
- Eikhenbaum, Boris, 129
- emancipation, 8, 37n1, 94, 107, 171
- Emes /publishers/, 175
- emigration, 94, 95–97, 110, 117, 120, 127, 139, 164n75, 166, 167, 176, 185, 198, 213, 227, 262
- Engel, Joel, 122, 125n22, 285
- erotic, 77, 100, 147, 217, 236, 244, 252
- eschatology, eschatological, 172n9
- Eser, SR, 127, 170, 260, 279, 280
- ethnographic, x, xi, xiii, 19, 49, 77, 96, 111, 119, 120, 121, 123, 124, 125n22, 163, 165, 166, 260
- Even-Zohar, Itamar, 13, 247n32
- Evseksii*, 173–174
- exile, xv, 22, 41n8, 51n36, 61, 65, 78, 84, 97, 137, 139, 140, 141, 190, 193, 194, 207, 218, 227, 242, 267, 279
- expressionism, expressionistic, 142, 145, 161, 168

- Fadeyev, Aleksandr, 178, 285
 family, 3–4, 7, 45n19, 46, 47, 51, 64, 65, 67, 72, 75–77, 79, 85, 86, 98, 99,
 100, 106, 108, 110, 111, 126, 127, 128, 135–136, 139, 140, 143, 144,
 150, 151–153, 155, 156, 158, 159, 160, 161, 166, 179, 180n29, 182,
 185n38, 188, 194, 196–197, 201, 208, 210, 211, 214–219, 222, 226, 239,
 244, 245, 247, 248, 249, 252, 254, 261, 263, 270, 271, 273, 277, 279, 281,
 282, 283
 fantasy, 63, 150, 152, 182, 206, 250, 251–254, 257
 Fascism, 175, 181, 236
 Flavius, Josephus, 66, 278
 folklore, xii, xiii, 17, 44, 49, 55, 61, 62, 81n101, 86, 120–122, 129, 130–131,
 166, 260
 formalists, formalist school, 209, 215n105, 273
 Franzos, Karl Emil, 66, 67n69
 freemasonic, 193
 Friedberg, Maurice, 9n23, 10, 178n26
 Fuks, Daniel, 30

 generations, 31, 38, 43–44, 48, 61, 65, 71, 84, 96, 107, 113, 116, 121, 126,
 128, 135, 152, 154, 156, 162, 166, 173, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 196, 211,
 214, 215, 225, 229, 236, 240, 245, 253, 257, 268, 269
 gentile, 65, 76, 77, 90, 91, 93, 201, 203, 236, 250, 253, 254, 257
 Gessen, Iulii, 90n2, 91n3, 93n7, 117n5, 119, 285
 ghetto, 13, 23, 38, 50, 74, 75, 118, 149, 188, 236n15, 245, 249, 253, 274
 Ginzburg, Vladimir, 122, 123, 285
 Ginzburg, Horatius/Horace, 92n5, 209, 277, 285
 Ginzburg, Shaul, 100, 119, 285
 Ginzburg, David, 120, 260
 “God-building,” 141, 172
 Gogol, Nikolai, xii, 49, 57, 58, 60, 164
 Gold, Michael, 30, 241–245
 Goncharov, Ivan, xii, 101, 138
 Gordon, Yehuda Leib, 43
 Gorenstein, Friedrich, x, xii, 220–227, 231, 266, 285
 Gorky, Maxim, xv, 6, 7, 27, 118, 139, 141, 149n52, 163, 167, 172, 173n12,
 189, 226, 259, 261, 280, 282, 285
 Gornfeld, Arkady, 2, 3n5, 6n15, 9, 115n1, 119, 131n34, 134, 149, 150
 Grass, Günther, 181
 Grigoriev, Apollon, 49

Grigorovich, Dmitry, 49

Grotesque, grotesqueness, 81, 85, 145, 163, 164, 184, 198, 204, 242, 248n34, 254, 256

Gudok, 200, 267

Gurevich, Grigory = Badanes, Gershon, 97

Habima theatre, 125, 174

Halévy, Yehuda, 206

Harkavi, Avraam, 119

Haskala, 10, 14, 29, 32, 38–39, 42, 43, 260, 275, 276

Hassidism, Hassidic, 23n54, 32, 54, 56, 77, 125n22, 130–131, 181, 185, 186, 187, 245, 260, 289

Hebrew, xi, 1, 2, 3n6, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 30

Heine, Heinrich, 12, 3n6, 69, 102, 206

Hekht, Semyon, 10, 56, 78, 86–87, 179, 200–207, 210, 219, 222, 250, 267, 286

Herzl, Theodor, 206, 268

Hitler, Adolf, 225

Holocaust, see Shoa

homeland, 32, 52, 117, 138, 166, 183, 189–190, 191, 194, 195, 205n89, 206, 207, 213, 240, 241n21, 268

Hugo, Victor, 132

humor, 24n56, 27, 45, 47, 58, 59, 68, 69, 81, 102–103, 186

Hungary, Hungarian, x, xiv, 14, 29, 30, 49, 66, 178, 236n15, 237, 238n18, 241n21, 246n31, 248, 277

identification, xiii, 6, 77, 79, 111, 188, 191, 200, 233, 240, 246, 255, 256

identity, xii, xiii, 1, 5, 8, 9, 12n29, 19, 20, 21, 25, 27, 29, 32, 40, 65, 71, 78, 80n99, 166, 171, 174, 177, 185, 204, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 233, 239, 240, 245–246, 253, 255, 260

ideological, 11, 12, 29, 38, 65, 116, 124, 128, 129, 148, 169n1, 174, 175, 186, 205n89, 207, 210, 212, 238, 243, 257, 267, 275

Ilf, Ilya, 50, 177, 200, 267

intelligentsia, 3, 6, 17–18, 19, 29, 37, 40, 44, 64, 70n77, 95, 97–98, 106, 116, 144, 165, 172, 177, 211, 224, 233, 255, 263

intolerance, 73, 132, 134

irony, ironic, 9, 44, 48, 52, 54–56, 58, 61, 67, 70, 79, 83, 84, 85, 96, 104, 109, 111, 137, 146, 181, 185, 186, 245, 248n34, 252, 277

Ivanov, Vyacheslav, 116

- Jabotinsky, Vladimir, x, 15–16, 22, 41, 56, 119, 206, 212–220, 241, 268–270
- Jerusalem, 12, 30, 68, 191, 193, 194, 198, 221, 222, 269, 270
- Jesus, 80, 244
- Jewish community, 10, 37, 44, 45n20, 54, 57, 64, 72, 73, 96, 99, 100, 101, 112, 123, 150, 208, 260
- Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society, see EIEO
- Jewish Literary Society, 119
- “Jewish” revolutionaries, 170–173
- journey, 44, 50, 52, 54, 55, 60, 156, 217, 223, 243, 272, 277
- Kabbala, Kabbalistic 79, 79n97, 91, 101, 103, 124, 125, 126, 147
- Kafka, Franz, 5, 22–23, 24n56, 27
- Kafkaesque, 143, 221
- Kahan, Abraham, 98
- Kanovich, Grigory, 25, 220
- Kantonist, 45–46, 71
- Kaplan, Mordecai, 21, 31
- Karamzin, Nikolai, 52
- Kassil, Lev, 135, 136n39, 178
- Kataev, Valentin, 178, 200, 280
- Katsenelson, Lev, 119
- Keller, Gottfried, xii
- Kertész, Imre, 181, 237
- Keszi, Imre, 237
- Khin, Rasheli, 118
- Khmelnitsky, Bogdan, 89, 223, 265, 286
- Khodasevich, Vladislav, 150–151, 154, 158, 163–164, 165n76, 177, 283
- Kipen, Aleksandr, x, xii, 11, 90, 93, 108, 109, 110, 131–138, 145, 158, 161, 166, 167, 179, 96, 203, 219, 231, 236, 239, 249, 271
- Kiš, Danilo, xii, 30, 181, 232
- Klier, John, xiv, 39n4, 41n7
- Kogan, see Naumov-Kogan
- Komsomol, 177
- KOMZET (Committee for the Agricultural Relocation of Jewish workers), 176
- “*korenizatsiia*”, 175
- Kornis, Mihály, 30
- Korolenko, Vladimir, 7, 100, 145n52, 272, 282

Kozakov, Mikhail, x, 179, 207–212, 219, 222, 272–273

Kun, Béla, 178

Kuprin, Aleksandr, 178, 282

Landau, Adolf, 40, 41, 63, 66n69, 274

language, xi, xiii, 1–2, 2–21, 21–30, 33, 40, 42, 48, 49, 54, 56, 57, 61, 66, 69, 72, 93, 96, 97, 98, 117–118, 119, 125n22, 132, 137, 139, 146, 150, 155, 161, 162, 165, 167, 174–175, 184, 185, 186, 190, 191, 193, 202n83, 209, 212n99, 213, 215, 218, 220, 223–224, 232n8, 234–235, 241n22, 244–247, 252, 255–256, 268, 270, 271, 273, 275, 276, 278

Lazarev, M., 4, 5, 9, 63n61, 95–96, 113, 126

legend, 51, 57, 82, 84, 85, 102, 123, 124, 126, 129–131, 137, 160, 183, 186, 194, 196, 202, 212, 237, 243, 260, 261, 266

Lermontov, Mikhail, 97, 107

Leskov, Nikolai, 93, 99, 247n33

Levanda, Lev, x, xii, 12, 39n3, 43, 44, 62–70, 71, 77, 83–84, 96, 102, 107, 181, 186, 211, 265, 273–275, 286

Lovets, 45, 72

Luftmensch, 51n36, 54, 151, 284

Lunacharsky, Anatoly, 141, 172, 184

Lunts, Lev, x, 76n91, 189–196, 224, 275, 286

Lvov-Rogachevsky, V, 1n1, 6, 8, 9, 13, 14n33, 38, 44, 45, 46

Makhno, 244

Mandelstam, Leon, xi, 42, 286

Mandelstam, Osip, 10, 26, 116, 117, 122, 286

Márai, Sándor, 241n21

Markish, Shimon, xi, xiii, 12, 21, 25n59, 30n68, 38, 44n16, 58, 66n69, 69n75, 100n17, 115, 125, 185n38, 212n98, 219, 229n1, 237n17, 248n36, 253n45, 286

marriage, 48, 66, 73, 85, 86, 106, 109, 111, 112, 113, 126, 150, 151, 194, 197, 217, 249, 264, 265, 282, 284

Marshak, Samuil, 198, 219

Marxism, Marxist, 13, 116–117, 137, 141, 171n8, 185, 212, 213, 271

Maskil, 38, 42, 43, 70, 204, 276

Moykher Sforim, Mendele, 11, 43, 50, 56, 59–61, 80, 86, 286

Messiah, 71, 79, 129, 130, 147, 147, 243, 245

Messianic, 79, 120, 123, 141, 172, 173n11, 243, 250

Meyrink, Gustav, xii, 195

- Mickiewicz, Adam, 65
 Mikhailovsky, Nikolai, 101n19, 122, 286
 Mikhalkov, Nikita, 220, 266
 Milyukov, Pavel, 164n75, 165, 199, 283, 286
 miracle, 58, 77–78, 129, 156, 205, 252n42
 Miron, Dan, 13n30, 15n34, 43n11, 60n53, 247n32
 Moscow, 25, 41, 47, 52, 94, 124, 125n22, 139, 150n57, 163n73, 165, 171n8,
 175, 184, 185, 223, 226, 242, 262, 267, 273, 280
 Moses, Mosaic, 40, 79–80, 95, 221, 270
 mouthpiece, 63, 64, 73
- Nabokov, Vladimir, 33, 164n75
 Nakhman, Khayim, 162, 201–206
 Narodnik, 15, 19, 95–97, 105, 110, 115–116, 120, 122n17, 131, 260, 271,
 278
 narration, 30n69, 55, 82, 167, 230, 245, 246, 252
 nation, national, 1, 2n2, 3, 6–9, 13–33, 37, 38, 40, 43, 49, 56, 71–72, 95, 97–
 98, 107, 113, 115, 118, 120–121, 128, 146, 171, 174–175, 177, 182, 191,
 198, 201n81, 202, 203n85, 207, 208, 212–213, 223, 225, 226, 240–241,
 245, 250, 265, 269, 278
 Naumov-Kogan (Naum Kogan), x, 97, 100–105, 166, 271–272
 negative, 20, 75, 76, 83, 85, 113, 122, 163, 192, 194, 197, 219, 222, 225, 233,
 250, 251, 253, 255
 Nekrasov, Nikolai, 8, 70, 265
 Nevakhovich, Yehuda Leib, xi, 42
 New Testament, 23, 141, 198, 227
 Nikitin, Vladimir, 45n21, 193, 241
 Nicholas I, 8, 39, 45, 71, 72, 93, 276
numerus clausus, 93–94, 216, 242
- “obnazheniie priioma,” 209
 Odessa, 20, 40, 41, 44, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56–59, 60, 61, 62, 89, 90, 91, 93,
 94, 100, 117, 132, 158, 160, 165, 182–185, 203, 206, 214–16, 220, 230,
 236, 241, 2, 243, 247, 259, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 267, 268, 270, 271,
 276, 277, 280, 282, 283
 OGPU, 174n15, 177
 Olbracht, Ivan, 30
 Olesha, Yury, 200, 267
 ornamental prose, 129, 142, 179, 190, 199, 232, 242

- Orthodox, Christian, 71, 144, 171n7, 174, 224, 272
 Orthodox, Jewish, 32, 38, 56, 128, 137, 260, 263, 264
 "ostraneniie," 162, 199, 209, 257
 Ozick, Cynthia, 2n4, 24, 51, 184n35, 248n35
- Pale, Pale of Settlement, 37, 52, 57, 81, 89, 93, 106, 112, 139, 169, 176, 242, 271
 Palestine, 23, 95, 100, 108–110, 113, 117, 124, 139, 176, 200, 205n89, 264, 265, 267, 268, 269, 270
 "Palestinophile" movement, 63, 139, 154n62, 167, 176, 213, 268, 270, 274
 Pap, Károly, 248, 249, 250
 parable, 23, 79–80, 101, 122, 259
 parataxis, paratactic, 233–238, 243, 246, 249, 255, 256
 Paris, xii, xv, 3, 25, 41, 131, 137, 139, 140, 146, 147, 150n57, 165, 185, 197, 203, 236, 259, 260, 262, 263, 269, 278, 282, 283
 Park, Robert E., 74
 Pasternak, Boris Leonidovich, 10, 26, 27, 122, 199, 232n8, 246
 Perec, Georges, 181, 236
 Perets, Isaac Loeb, 9, 286
 periodicals, x, 14, 39–41, 70, 90, 118, 122n17, 125, 167, 189n53, 261, 265, 271, 277
 periodization, 12, 13, 38–39
 St. Petersburg (Petrograd), 6, 7, 19, 20, 26, 40, 41, 42, 52, 63, 89n1, 93n7, 94, 98, 101, 107, 108, 109, 112, 119, 122, 124, 125, 165, 184, 185, 190, 191, 192, 194, 260, 261, 265, 271, 272, 274, 275, 278
 Petlyura, Simion, 201n81, 203n85, 204, 250, 286
 Petrov, Evgeny, 50, 177, 200
 Pilnyak, Boris, 9, 199, 232, 247n33, 286
 Pinsker, Leon, 41, 94, 95, 286
 Pisarev, Andrei, 8, 107
 pogrom, xi, xii, 7, 8, 14, 39, 41, 57n46, 63, 70n76, 90–95, 96, 97, 105, 108, 109, 111, 113, 115, 117, 118, 120, 122, 124, 128, 132, 133, 134, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 158, 160, 161, 162, 166–168, 169, 173, 178, 181, 184, 203, 205n89, 206, 210, 211, 215, 223, 225, 231, 232, 238–239, 244, 259, 261, 263, 268, 269, 271, 274, 279, 281
poimanik, 45, 265
 Poland, Poles, 20, 30, 37, 63, 64, 125n22, 261
 primitive, 210, 211, 219, 235, 255–256

prostitute/s, 46, 75, 126, 148, 150, 158–159, 160, 183, 186n41, 218, 224, 243, 244

Protocols of the Elders of Zion, 92, 170

Pushkin, Aleksandr, 29, 49, 107, 164, 240

Rabelais, François, 81

Rabinovich, Osip, ix, x, 12, 19, 39, 41, 42, 43–62, 69, 70, 83, 96, 105, 186, 220, 273–274, 275–277, 286

Radishchev, Aleksandr, 52

Rassvet, 39–41, 43, 63, 94, 265, 269, 274, 277

religion, 6, 20, 22, 29, 30–33, 38, 51, 57, 78, 111–113, 124, 128, 133, 134, 141, 143, 146, 166, 171–173, 174, 177, 194, 245, 247, 250, 274

Remizov, Aleksei, 129

revolution, revolutionary, 6, 26, 37, 66, 93, 109, 110, 115–117, 119, 127–128, 132–133, 139, 144, 151, 158, 169, 170–173, 184, 186–187, 197, 199, 207, 208, 212–213, 218, 226, 234, 241, 242, 243, 250, 259, 268, 271, 272, 275, 278, 279–280

ritual, 14, 49–50, 71, 80, 81, 84n107, 129n29, 137, 187n43, 188, 205, 241, 250

romantic, 46, 49, 69, 83, 126, 129, 132, 183, 191, 192, 194, 195, 199, 203, 206, 208, 262

Rombro, Yakov, x, 78–88, 101, 204, 277–278

Rosenzweig, Franz, 195

Roth, Henry, 30, 241n22, 245–251

Roth, Joseph, 98

Roth, Philip, 20n48

Ryvkin, Meier/Miron, 118, 240

Saltykov-Shchedrin, Mikhail 70, 97, 122, 286

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 210, 217n108, 236

Satan, 79

satire, satiric, 52, 55, 61, 83–84, 150, 151, 200, 214, 226, 267

Scheiber, Sándor, 49, 55n40, 80, 81n101

Schultz, Bruno, 30

Self-hatred, self-hating, 26, 32, 73, 76, 109, 128, 191, 204, 245, 248–249, 253, 257

Serapion Brothers, 189, 192, 193, 195, 275

Shabbat, Saturday, 58, 68, 69, 74, 98–99, 101, 102, 103, 110, 138, 181, 187, 194, 195, 197, 205

- Shakespeare, William, xii, 113, 252, 254
 Shoah, Holocaust, 168, 236, 237-238, 257
 Sholokhov, Mikhail, 178
shtetl, 44, 55n41, 98, 99, 100, 101, 122, 127, 176, 185, 187, 204, 205, 206, 245, 264, 272
 Siberia, 45n21, 137, 138, 153, 196, 197, 280
 Sicher, Efraim, 25, 26, 27
 Singer, Isaac Bashevis, 80, 98, 100, 119, 246
Skaz, 99, 137, 154-155, 179, 215, 247
 Sobol, Andrei, x, 41, 78, 108, 138, 196-200, 203, 236, 279-281, 286
 Socialism, socialist, 95-97, 115, 117, 131, 132, 137, 139-141, 148, 154n62, 171-173, 175, 178, 186, 212, 245, 278, 279
 Sologub, Fyodor, 129
 Solomonov, Abraham, 42
 Stalin, Yosif (Dzhugashvili), 175-176, 219, 222n112
 stalinism 225-227, 267, 280, 221
 Stanislavsky, Konstantin, 124, 125n22
 stereotype/s, 51, 153, 159, 166, 170, 177, 194, 201, 210
 Sternberg, Lev, 19, 119
 Sterne, Laurence, 52
 Strykowski, Julian, 80, 171n8
 stylized, stylization, 70, 129, 166, 190, 215, 247, 265
 suicide, 65, 113, 178, 218, 224, 280, 281
 Svirsky, Aleksei, 118
 synagogue, 24, 43, 57, 68, 79, 80, 82, 100, 101-103, 123, 127-128, 174, 186, 188, 191, 195, 231, 245, 276
 Talmud, Talmudic, 7, 42, 72, 79-80, 82, 101-103, 105, 106, 120, 122, 128, 138, 233, 245, 261, 263, 264, 273, 276, 279
 Tarkovsky, Andrei, 220, 266
 temple, 68, 130, 141, 172
 Temporary Government, 171
 tendentious, 5, 8, 38, 65, 71, 82, 95, 100, 115, 129, 161, 208, 213n102, 214, 260, 265
 tolerance, 208, 227, 233-238, 250, 253, 255, 256
 Tolstoi, Aleksei, 7
 Tolstoy, Lev, 116n3, 149, 278
 Torah, 42, 79, 80, 122, 128, 180, 188, 263, 273, 276
 totalitarianism, 175, 236

tradition, traditional, xiii, 2, 8–9, 20, 22–23, 25, 31, 40, 48, 51, 52, 63, 64, 71, 73, 74, 77, 81, 83, 85, 96, 98, 99, 100, 101, 105, 106, 109, 111, 113, 116, 119, 121, 124, 127, 128, 130–131, 138, 140, 146, 156, 166, 169n1, 173, 175, 182, 185, 186, 188, 192n66, 193, 194, 201, 202, 206, 211, 216, 234, 235, 245, 253, 259, 263, 264, 265, 275, 281

transcendent, 130

Trotsky, Lev, 171

Trotskyites, 225

Tsar, Tsarist, 13, 39n3, 40, 45, 47, 60, 64, 73, 89, 90, 92, 97, 116, 119, 132, 170, 184, 199, 205n89, 273

Tsenzor, Dmitry, 118, 178n25

Tsinberg, Sergei (Israil), 41n8, 119, 121n14, 149–150, 163

Turgenev, Ivan, xii, 46n23, 48n28, 49, 65, 66, 75, 98, 101n18, 138, 252n43

Tzaddik, 47, 54, 58, 77–78, 264

typical, 22, 47, 54, 62, 64, 72, 74, 76, 81, 83, 97, 99, 102n20, 106, 108, 125, 127, 128, 137, 151, 154–155, 158, 162, 165, 166, 167, 181, 190n57, 196, 199n79, 206, 211, 215, 220, 221, 237, 239, 243n34, 250, 252, 261

Ukraine, Ukrainian, 28, 48, 49, 56–57, 104, 136, 140, 142, 173n12, 174n17, 175, 178, 183, 201, 203n85, 204, 215, 220, 222–224, 250, 263, 265, 266

university, 42, 94, 120, 140–141, 152, 218–219, 221–222, 268, 272, 275, 276, 282

Uspensky, Gleb, 8, 97, 120, 122, 260

Vajsenberg, Samuil, 122

Vakhtangov, Yevgeny, 125n22

Vámos, Miklós, 30, 246n31

Vilna, 62, 63, 124–125, 179, 260, 273–274, 278

Vinaver, Maxim, 119

Voinovich, Vladimir, 25, 136n40, 178n27

Voskhod, 19, 40–41, 63, 95, 110–111, 167, 274, 281, 282

Wandering Jew, 23, 51, 78, 177n23, 194, 198, 202, 248

War Communism, 169

World War I, 6, 123, 173, 195, 237, 260

World War II, 136, 176, 222, 223, 237, 270

Yaroshevsky, Sergey, x, xii, xiii, 67, 90, 96, 97, 105–114, 131, 132, 133, 145, 166, 236, 281, 286

Yiddish, 1, 2-13, 14-20, 24, 43-44, 45, 47, 48, 59-62, 78, 98, 99, 102, 117, 119, 221, 125, 126, 137, 149n52, 150, 155, 165, 173-176, 181, 183n32, 188, 198, 211, 213, 215, 220, 223, 246-247, 254, 260-261, 264, 267, 271, 276, 277, 278

“Yiddishization,” 173-176

Yushkevich, Semyon, x, xi, 7, 10, 50, 56, 108, 115, 118, 148, 149-166, 179, 215n103, 239, 243, 246n31, 259, 282-283, 286

Zaitsev, Boris, 165, 283, 286

Zamyatin, Evgeny, 129, 247n33, 286

Zinoviev, Lev, 171

Zionist, Zionism, 12, 13n30, 15, 18, 19, 20, 23, 95-97, 115, 117n5, 173-174, 176, 206-207, 214, 220, 264, 268-269, 270, 279

Znaniie (volumes, circle), 131, 139, 150, 161, 163, 167, 238n18, 259, 271, 282

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